

Simon Holmes,

Carpenter.



BY

J. Jackson Wray.



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"She clasped her thin white hands . . . . and softly prayed, 'Father in heaven! Grant it in Thy mercy, for my Saviour's sake.' "—*Page* 36.

Frontispiece.]

SIMON HOLMES,

THE CARPENTER OF ASPENDALE.

BY

J. JACKSON WRAY,

AUTHOR OF

"NESTLETON MAGNA," "MATTHEW MELLOWDEW,"
"LIGHT FROM THE OLD LAMP," "HONEST JOHN STALLIBRASS,"
"THE MAN WITH THE KNAPSACK," "WIDOW WINPENNY'S WATCHWORD,"
ETC. ETC. ETC.

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SIMON HOLMES.

CHAPTER I.

GIVES THE READER A VIEW OF ASPENDALE AT SUNSET; AND A GLIMPSE OF THORPE ASPEN AFTER NIGHTFALL.

"See where the falling day
In silence steals away,
Behind the western hills withdrawn;
Her fires are quenched, her beauty fled,
While blushes all her face o'erspread,
As conscious she had ill fulfilled
The promise of the dawn."

Anna Letitia Barbauld.

MY story opens in 'canny' Yorkshire; for in the hill country of that biggest, and as I may be forgiven for thinking, that bonniest of English shires lies the valley of Aspendale. The season is autumn, and the time is evening. The red sun, after lingering awhile on the distant wold as if to fling a valediction on the vale beneath, is setting amid attendant clouds, which receive, as courtiers do, the reflected glory of their royal lord. Blushing with a proud content, they wear their purple garments

and golden fringes in stately fashion, but only to doff them by-and-bye as courtiers have to do when their god withdraws his countenance and transfers his favours otherwhere.

The soft twilight broods above the quiet beauties of Aspendale. The landscape is limited but lovely, and the eye rests upon it with 'a soothing sense of pleasure.' It is like a vignette, which is all the more a masterpiece because the eye and the mind can take it in at one view; can print it on the memory and reproduce it at will; not by degrees as in a panorama, but at one bright glance: a photograph with the added charm of colour, which at present the photograph fails to give.

Yonder at the head of the valley stands an ancient castle-like mansion known through many a changeful century as Aspen Towers. Its turrets, covered with ivy to the very top, are the most conspicuous objects in the picture, always excepting the remarkably tall and slender spire of Thorpe Aspen Church, which is said to be the most perfect specimen of its kind. Aspen Chase, amid whose wealth of timber the mansion stands, is of large dimensions, and at one time could vie as a deer-forest with any in the king's domains. The village of Thorpe Aspen, snugly laid in the centre of the valley, is composed of two or three clusters of neat cottages, besprinkled here and there with farmsteads, and the roomier premises of the village carpenter, blacksmith, and general shopkeeper. Around the most of these, the humbler kinds of climbing shrubs and creepers pursue their wilful way, and in such abundance that it is not easy to tell of what material the walls are built. Each cottage has its rood or two of garden ground, and each plot, thanks to the laws and usages of Aspendale, is kept fairly trim and tidy, some of them bright and beautiful all round the year.

Near the bottom of the valley stands a mill which can perform its grinding operations either by the power of

wind or water, and its four broad sails and its big wide mill-pool give happy touches to the rural picture. The pool is fed by a brook of clear water that has its rise miles away beyond the distant woods of Aspen Chase. After flowing through the park and skirting the village, it broadens and deepens into a spacious sheet of water. Then it pours its waters across the sluice or upon Peter Prout's undershot water-wheel, and wanders away to 'join the brimming river' a few miles beyond the valley, where the thriving town of Chilworth lies hidden in a valley of its own.

In order to make this brief picture of bonny Aspendale and bonnier Thorpe Aspen complete, the reader must commission his imagination to fill in the sketch with green fields, snug farmsteads, shady paddocks, orchards, bush and coppice, clumps of beeches, small plantations of fir, and the 'Chase' in the distance, whose foliage is already beginning to show those charming tints which only autumn can supply. Here and there the eye falls on a field of turnips, green and flourishing, waiting the advent of the sheep, who will have happy times there by-and-bye. One or two late corn-fields too, are dotted with golden stooks of barley, which are also waiting,—waiting for the Widow Atheling's waggons to come and bear them away to the spacious stackyards of Aspen Garth.

I tell you that you cannot very well paint the landscape lovelier or fairer than it really is as it gleams in the soft twilight, or rather in the mild radiance of the harvest moon, which is now sailing across the heavens with patches of fleecy clouds around it,—white-robed nymphs attendant on Diana, queen of night. Even while we look, however, the bright vision begins to pass, as all bright visions in this world do pass; all the more reason why we should rejoice in them while we may, and cultivate the while the inner vision of Faith and Hope which can look upon and claim still brighter things that never pass. The autumn

wind blowing from the south-west is bringing up a broad bank of cloud. Like a heavy curtain it gradually drapes the sky—swallows up the lighter cloudlets and puts the moon under strong eclipse.

The darkness gathers round. The night falls upon the ivy-covered turrets of Aspen Towers. Night has fallen on creeper-covered cottage, gabled farmstead, and silent mill. A chill autumn fog comes down to make the scene more gloomy, and we who have sketched the scene are willing enough to turn away, and seek shelter and warmth beneath some hospitable roof and beside some cheerful hearth.

However pleasant it may be to 'take mine ease in mine inn,' it cannot be done so far as the village of Thorpe Aspen is concerned. For that kind of accommodation you must trudge up the valley to the 'Royal George,' or down the valley to the 'Chequers.' Both of them are beyond the parish bounds, for by almost common consent the Thorpe Aspeners say of the public-house, that its room is better than its company. There are a few who hold a different opinion and who grumble at this high-handed interference with the rights of an Englishman; but these few would have been vastly benefited, poor bibulous mortals, if the veto had been in force full fifty miles around. As for 'good accommodation for travellers,' however, there is no lack. Almost every house in the village is an open house of call; from Sir Godwin Spofforth's castellated mansion at the upper end of the valley, to the whitewashed dwelling of Miller Prout at the lower, each is upon occasion a 'Traveller's Rest.'

Shall we try our fortune at Aspen Towers? Nay, alas! It is night, dark night there too, for the sorrows and the shadows of life know no partiality. They invade the threshold of hall and hut with equally resistless power, and leave both the one and the other at an equally laggard pace. The proud baronet's son and heir, self-willed and

self-deluded, is far away from home, running a wild and reckless course; sowing such seeds of sin as are sure to produce, and are already producing for him and others a harvest of thorns. It is night, chill night at Aspen Towers. For within the luxurious chambers, Death has sent his stern process server, dire Disease, and the fair young lady Ethel, sole daughter of the great man's house and heart, lies at this moment pale and helpless beneath the reading of the writ.

Shall we cast ourselves on the hospitality of the kindly household at Aspen Garth? Nay, alas! It is night, dark night in the home of the Athelings. The husband and the father has only just been laid in his grave beneath the yew-trees of Thorpe Aspen churchyard, and there is sorrow for his loss. It is night; for by the chimney-nook whereon the faggots crackle and sparkle all unnoted, a comely matron, with much silver in her hair and much sadness in her face, sits rocking herself in restless and silent ache of heart, the subject of a grief too deep for tears.

> "A mother's love!
> If there be one thing pure,
> That can endure
> When all else pass away;
> If there be aught
> Surpassing human deed or thought,
> It is a mother's love!"

And this mother, this widowed mother's bright and treasured boy, her youngest-born, her Benjamin, 'the son of her right hand,' has become her Benoni, 'the son of her sorrow.' He is a wanderer, lost, lost among the dark mountains: gone, gone from home and from God; no, not from God; not from his mother's heart. These will not be left. They follow, follow. But will their call bring the wanderer back again? O dark night! dark, chill night! brooding over Towers and Garth! O sorrowful widow and mother! O sad

father with a bitter grief at the heart and black care on the brow! Will the sun ever rise again? Will the Valley of Shadows ever greet the morn again? That is what Widow Atheling asks, as she bows her silvery hair and rocks herself in the ingle nook. That is what the haggard baronet says as he sits in the shadows of his library, oblivious to the lowering light of the lamp upon the table; lowering and lessening, like the life upstairs, for lack of plenishment. Will the day dawn and the shadows flee away? Widow Atheling! Sir Godwin Spofforth! "Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion; that turneth the shadow of death into morning; that maketh the day dark with night."

"There came the Day and Night,
Riding together both with equal pace;
But one on palfrey black, the other white;
But Night had covered her uncomely face
With a black veil, and held in hand a mace,
On top whereof the moon and stars were pight,
And sleep and darkness round about did trace;
But Day did bear upon his sceptre's height
The goodly sun encompassed all with beamès bright."

CHAPTER II.

SIMON HOLMES THE CARPENTER RECEIVES A MESSAGE; AND PETER PROUT THE MILLER RECEIVES A REBUKE.

"*Flav.* Speak, what trade art thou?
1st Cit. Why, sir, a carpenter.
Mar. Where, then, is thy apron and thy rule?
What dost thou with thy best apparel on?"
Shakespeare.

NEAR the centre of Thorpe Aspen, and at some short distance from the stately entrance to the park of Aspen Towers, stood the homestead of Simon Holmes the village carpenter. The house itself, though low and humble in its architecture, and thatched like the rest of the cottages, was more spacious and commodious than its neighbours. Its large diamond-paned windows were of Gothic shape, and had some small amount of ornamentation in their framework. Over its latticed porch roses and clematis and honeysuckle luxuriously intertwined. Altogether Simon's home gave evidence alike of comfort and good taste.

The house was surrounded by a large and well-kept garden, except at one point, the point of juncture between the cottage and the shop. The shop itself, in which were two

long carpenters' benches, and all the necessary tools and tokens of the owner's trade, was flanked by a good-sized shed or two for the storage of dry and seasoned timber, and these again abutted on a spacious yard. In this was placed the saw-pit, and a moderate pile of timber, all of which in turn was destined to feel the tooth of the saw, and like Proteus to change its shape under the manipulation of Simon and his journeyman and apprentice, who called him 'Maister,' and who, together with their industrious employer, did carpenter's, wheelwright's, and general jobbing work among the farmers for many a mile around.

In the yard, too, were carts, waggons, drills and other implements pertaining to farming operations. All these were, so to speak, in hospital, and were waiting for skilful treatment at the hands of Simon and his assistants. Taken altogether, Simon's house, garden, sheds and yard were quite a feature in Thorpe Aspen; and so, for that matter, was Simon himself. He was 'quite a character,' and his name, fame, and credit stood high through all the region of Aspendale.

I will at once avow that the quaint and intelligent old carpenter is a special favourite of mine, and as I intend that he shall stand in the same relationship to my readers, I desire to draw his portrait with some degree of precision and with whatever amount of skill I can command.

Picture to yourself, then, a rather tall and yet stoutish man of vigorous build, whose sixty years sit lightly on him, owing to the blended influence of a good constitution, a good character, and a well-ordered life. He is clean shaven alike on cheek and chin, with the exception of short half-length whiskers, almost as narrow as they are short, and whose presence has so little to do with his general appearance, that you are led to wonder why they should be there at all. His small and somewhat humorous grey eyes are arched by a pair of bushy eyebrows, whose colour, like

his hair, is brown with a tendency to become as grey as his eyes, and surmounted by a well-developed and intelligent-looking brow. His nose is prominent and slightly bulbous, and answers well to the twinkling eye as an evidence of a kindly and humorous disposition. There is that, however, in the shape of his mouth and the set of his chin which indicates an ability to have and to hold an opinion of his own. His hair is worn rather longer than is usual with his kind, a fashion which is probably owing to his notable poetic faculty and turn of mind. His nether garments for week-day wear are invariably of fustian, and generally bear evidence that he united the painter's craft with that which is more legitimately his own. Supply him with a sleeved waistcoat of some dark-coloured cloth, and occasionally, if the weather is cold, with a sort of half coat, half jacket of the same material, with a low felt hat, never forgetting the indispensable white apron, sign and token of his profession, and you have a true portrait of honest, genial, quaint, poetic Simon Holmes as I knew him in dear old Thorpe Aspen, I will not say how many years ago.

Simon and his wife Rebecca—a stirring, comely, motherly body, whose stout figure was invested in a print gown, and whose whitening hair was smoothly imprisoned in a white muslin cap with a double frill for either cheek—had just finished their morning meal, and Simon was about to return to his duties at the bench, when Sir Godwin Spofforth rode up to the garden gate.

"Hallo, there, Simon!" shouted he, and forthwith the carpenter let down his white apron which had been folded round his waist during breakfast, and made haste to receive the baronet's commands.

"Good mornin', Sir Godwin," said Simon, touching his hat, "I'se hopin' Miss Godwin is better this mornin'?"

"I would to God she were, Simon," replied the baronet,

and there was that in his tone which told clearly enough how deeply he felt and how much he feared.

The face of the sympathetic Simon clouded over in a moment, as he said in a lower tone,

"I do hope that the young lady isn't ony woss."

"I fear she is, Simon, I—greatly—fear—she—is."

There was a quaking in the speaker's voice and a quiver about his lips which told that his soul was being stirred to its inmost depths.

"The physician from London is coming again to-day," said the baronet, "and Ethel says that she would like to see you before he arrives."

"I'll be at the Towers directly," said the carpenter, "but, excuse my freedom. Sir Godwin. You hev a big load o' your own to carry. There's scarce a soul i' Aspendale 'at wouldn't help yo' to carry it if they could. We can't, Sir Godwin, but there's One that can. I couldn't help thinkin' o' you when I was readin' this mornin's psalm. 'Cast thy burden on the Lord.' It's wonderful easy when you're used to it."

"I daresay it is, Simon, I daresay it is," said the baronet in a tone which showed that however easy it might become, it was to him an unfamiliar doctrine now. "Come as soon as you can," he continued, and so saying he turned his horse around and pursued his morning ride.

Simon Holmes paced the garden-path in silence, but in his heart he said, "God help her, and God help him!" Simon's aspirations of that kind generally gained a hearing, and not seldom an evident answer from Him whom the godly carpenter had long been accustomed to call "a prayer-hearin' an' a prayer-answerin' God."

"Rebecca, my lass," said Simon to his wife, "the big shadow up at the Hall is settlin' doon, ah fancy, thick an' dark. Sir Godwin, poor man, 's in a parlous state o' mind. Miss Ethel's sent for me, so I'm goin' directly."

"Aye, go your ways, Simon," replied Rebecca feelingly. "I doot the poor gell isn't long for this world. She's ower good for it, I'm thinkin'. I do pity Sir Godwin, his 'art's fair wrapped up in her. He looks a'most as pale as a ghost."

"Hey, poor man," said the carpenter, "he's well-nigh brokken-hearted, an' the worst on't is, he hezn't a grip on Him 'at can mend it. But, 'Becca, somehoo or another, I nivver feel as though Miss Ethel won't pull through. Nothing's ower hard for the Lord. Mortal man soon comes to the end of his tether; but wi' Him it's different. Who knows but——"

"Hey, hey, Simon. Bless your hopeful heart! you could always pictur' things bright anuff, an' I don't say 'at it isn't best, but you kno——."

"But, but! bother the 'buts,' Becky," interposed Simon cheerily, "I wish the wod wasn't i' the dictionary. 'Buts' 'll nivve mak' butter hoo ivver hard yo' chon 'em. The promises o' God hev a way o' knockin' 'em on the head, one doon an' t'other come on."

The honest dame smiled as usual at the ready answer of her warm-hearted and sanguine spouse, and proceeded to prepare him his Sunday suit that he might be made sufficiently presentable to pass the imposing portals of Aspen Towers.

While Simon was pursuing a process of ablution with the same end in view, the door opened and admitted the rotund, short-statured miller, Peter Prout, whitened even to the hair and eyebrows with the powdery tokens of his calling.

"Mornin', Mrs. Holmes," said he in a shrill and squeaking voice not at all in proportion to his size. "Is t' maister in?"

"Yis, he's in," said Rebecca, "but he's just gettin' tidied up a bit. He hez to go up to the Hall."

"The Hall!" said the miller, drawling out the word

sarcastically. "Seeams te me 'at it's allus 'the 'All' wi' him. What a strange man he is! He was te cum this mornin' an' put some floorin' booards doon i' mah mill. But ah reckon it matters nowt te him if ah brek me leg an' gan tummlin' through atop o' t'mill-wheel. The 'All, eh? *He* knoas which side 'is bread's buttered on."

Mrs. Holmes was half minded to hail the suggested catastrophe with a sentence of cheerful submission, for Miller Prout was a 'nagger' according to the verdict of Thorpe Aspen, which might not be very well gainsaid. The miller's tongue was wont to wag almost as fast as his hopper and with quite as much clack. Becky Holmes had learnt the golden lesson, however, to think twice before you speak once, especially if you feel 'warm' at the time, so she simply said,—

"I daresay he'll come to you as soon as he comes back. Simon isn't one 'at forgets 'is promises, as you might very well know by this time, Miller Prout."

"Why, bless me life, you needn't tak' a fello' up se sharp," said the miller, speaking still more shrilly, for, like the 'plain-speaking' tribe in general, he had a wondrously thin skin of his own. "Ah only said 'at ah 'ad fost claim on 'im; but ah reckon 'at ivverybody 'll ha' te give way te 'The 'All'!"

"They will to-day at onyrate," said Rebecca, still retaining her self-command, "for it's a matter o' life an' death, I'se afeared."

"You don't say seea! What then, is t' young lady woss? Ah's sorry te hear it. But there, rich fooaks ha' te feel t' rub o' t' grun'stun as weel as poor fooaks. There's mair then them i' Thorpe Aspen 'at's gettin' t' han'le tonn'd pratty fast just noo. Ha' yo' heeard t' news?"

"No, what is it?" said Rebecca, who could not be expected to be without the attribute which is supposed to belong specially, though by no means peculiarly, to her sex.

"Why, they say," said the miller, "that young Alfred Atheling's run off wi' a big round bag o' guineas belangin' te 'is maister, an' 'at 'im an' young Spofforth's gone abroad te spend it."

"They say," said Simon Holmes, who had now come down stairs and was putting on his boots as he sat on one of the lower steps—"'They say' is one o' the biggest liars i' all the country side, an' them that quotes him ower often gets tarred wi' the same brush."

"Lawk a massy, Simon! Ah didn't knoa 'at you were there," said the miller, taken aback by the warmth of the carpenter's remark. "Ah's nobbut tellin' yo' what ah've heeard."

"O dear, poor Mrs. Atheling!" said tender-hearted Rebecca. "However will she bear it?"

"Why, badly aneeaf, you may be sure, poor creatur!" said the miller, who looked rather pleased than otherwise. "I'll tell you what, Mrs. Holmes, it's my opinion 'at a yard or two o' Tyburn hemp weel twisted wad be about the best thing for 'im; an' accordin' te my opinion, he's varry likely te get it."

"I knoa o' something 'at would suit him a good deal better," said Simon rising to his feet and confronting the loose-tongued man of meal, "a good *deal* better, an' some other folks an' all."

"Why, what's that, Simon?" said the miller, in a softer tone, as one who is deprecating a too strong rejoinder.

"Why, the grace o' God i' the heart, Miller," said the carpenter. "Plenty o' that would keep him out o' mischief, an' put a bridle on talkative tongues 'at sadly want some reinin' up."

"O dear me!" said Peter Prout, pulling out his big silver watch from his fob. "ah didn't knoa ah'd been here se lang. Ah mun be off noo."

The fact is that the watch had been brought out in

readiness to cover his retreat, for the miller had expected a rebuke, for downright Simon was very awkward handling. Still he managed to give a kind of Parthian shot as he retreated :—

"I say, Simon, you weean't forget them floorin' booards. Ah'll try te keep me-sen frev a brokken neck, while yo' cum back fre' 'The 'All.' Just tickle 'is memory up a bit, Missis Ah's frightened 'at 'The 'All' 'll be gettin' 'im altegither."

Hereupon the miller betook him to his cart, which had all the while been standing at the gate, and in which he now departed to make his daily round; to deliver sundry sacks of flour, 'sharps' and barley meal, and to gather grain to feed his mill-stones and his pouch. It is much to be feared that Dobbin received more than her usual share of whip, having in that respect to stand proxy for Simon Holmes the carpenter.



CHAPTER III.

ROBERT ATHELING MAKES A SOLEMN PROMISE; AND SIMON HOLMES PAYS A VISIT TO ASPEN GARTH.

"What is there like a father to a son?
A father quick in love, wakeful in care,
Tenacious of his trust, proof in experience,
Severe in honour, perfect in example,
Stamped with authority."

Sheridan Knowles.

BEFORE we follow Simon Holmes on his errand to Aspen Towers, we must turn aside awhile and look in upon the shadowed household of Aspen Garth, upon the widow with the silver hair who sits in the 'night,' rocking herself in silence by the old-fashioned ingle-nook. Widow Atheling's weeds of widowhood have only been very lately donned, and the sorrow of that great loss still sat heavy on her soul. What manner of man her husband was will be discovered by the necessary mention of a solemn and important incident that occurred as he lay upon his death-bed.

"My poor lad! My poor wandering lad! Robert, my son, promise me that you will never give up all hope of him, never give up joining with your mother in prayer for

him, never grow tired of seeking him, never rest content until Alfred, your brother Alfred, comes home again to Thorpe Aspen, and to his father's God."

These words, earnest words, were spoken by Farmer Atheling, as he lay back upon the pillow from which his good grey head will never more be lifted, except for his removal to his final resting-place beneath the spreading yew-trees in Thorpe Aspen churchyard, the sacred spot in which many generations of Athelings were laid asleep.

By the bedside of the dying man was seated his eldest son, a fine-featured, stalwart young yeoman, of some six or seven and twenty years of age, whose fingers were held lovingly in the hand of his beloved and dying parent. The young man's grief at his impending loss was not to be measured by words; and as he sat watching and listening in that solemn midnight hour, his strong frame trembled and his heart beat strong and quickly with suppressed emotion.

Robert Atheling's love and devotion to both his parents amounted to a pious passion, and it may well be said that both they and he were worthy of the strong absorbing love that bound their hearts in one. Through all the parish of Thorpe Aspen, through all Aspendale, and even in regions beyond, Robert's tender attention, his assiduous care, his loyal service and self-sacrifice on their behalf, were known and honoured.

It may well be understood, therefore, that the young man's heart was very sore, and that his very soul was sad and sorrowful as he sat by this death-bed, and watched his honoured father slowly gliding out of life before his eyes. Every line in that noble face, every grey hair above those pale brows was dear to him; so he sat, making strong effort to swallow down the choking in his throat, and for a few moments he made his father no reply. The old man pressed his hand more firmly, fixed his dimming eyes upon him

more eagerly, and said with all the energy of his failing powers :—

"Robert, my son! My dear, good, faithful son! Will you promise?"

Recalled to a full, clear conviction of all that his father's words implied, for latterly Alfred had dropped entirely out of sight and hearing of home and friends, Robert placed his other hand on that of his aged sire, and said earnestly and solemnly—

"Yes, dear father, I promise. I will never give up uniting my prayers with my mother's on his behalf; I will never give up hoping for him; I will never grow tired of seeking him; I will never rest contented until Alfred comes home again to Thorpe Aspen, and to his father's God."

"God bless thee, my son!" said the old man, with a smile on his face and a light in his eyes which more than half repaid the young man for his solemn vow, "the God of thy fathers bless thee! Now, Robert, I can die content. We shall meet again, an unbroken family in heaven. As for thee, my son, thine shall be the best of blessings from the hand of God: 'The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace!' And, Robert, my son, HE WILL!"

The young man felt that then and there a benediction had fallen on him; that then and there his father's words had received the sanction of his God. This interview had been held in private at his father's own request. The rest of the family were now admitted, the weeping mother, soon to be a widow, two sorrowing daughters, and a younger son, worthy scions of a noble stock—the whole family, except, alas! that young misguided brother whose sad lapse from the path of virtue was the only thorn in his father's pillow, as he was lying there upon the bed of death.

"All will be well, dear wife, faithful and beloved fellow-

pilgrim for many happy years," said the dying man. "All will be well with you, and with your youngest-born. For the rest you need no assurance. All is well! As for me, I repose my soul on the merits of my Saviour, and am passing out of the shadow into the shine."

Each of them in turn received a loving word, a farewell kiss, a final benediction, and then after a little while came the end. It was a peaceful end: the death of the righteous always is; it is the fitting finish of a godly life. It was a calm sunset, and the western sky was bright with the golden light of a 'sure and certain hope':—and then, on this side, Night; on the other, MORNING!

"After the middle watches,
As they softly near him trod,
His soul from its prison fetters
Was loosed by the hand of God.

One moment his pale lips trembled
With the triumph he might not tell,
As the sight of the life immortal
On his spirit's vision fell.

Then the look of rapture faded,
And the beautiful smile was faint,
As that in some ancient picture
On the face of a dying saint.

And they felt in the lonesome midnight,
As they sat by the silent dead,
What a light on the pathway of others
The feet of the righteous shed.

And they thought how with faith unshrinking
He came to the Jordan's tide,
And taking the hand of the Saviour
Went up on the heavenly side."

As soon as opportunity served him, Robert Atheling went into his chamber, not to weep there, like Joseph of old, but again to register the serious promise he had made to his

dying father, and on his knees to seek for strength and guidance for the fulfilment of that fraternal mission to which he had just set solemn seal.

In due time the tombstone beneath the yew-trees covered another tenant, and on it was inscribed, together with a truthful record of his virtues, another name, the name of Edward Atheling, whose memory is held in special honour in Thorpe Aspen to this day. Standing by that grave, Robert Atheling shed many a tributary tear. Then he turned away to pursue his double mission in life—to sustain and comfort his widowed mother, and to win back the wandering prodigal to his mother's home and to both his mother's and his father's God.

During those first thick-shadowed days that followed after the funeral of Farmer Atheling, the old carpenter Simon Holmes was often at Aspen Garth, where his visits were warmly welcomed and much esteemed. He was a genuine 'son of consolation,' Simon was, for he was learned in the higher lore, the knowledge and wisdom which come by a devout study of The Book and by inner revelations from Him that wrote it, the knowledge and wisdom that grows and ripens in them who by experience can testify concerning the deep things of God. Thorpe Aspen was not highly favoured in the matter of true Christian teaching. The vicar of the parish was one of that ineffective and formal class, now fast dying out before the dawn of a better and brighter day, who fancied that their duties were rounded by the set performance of all appointed ecclesiastical formalities in the church and out of it, and that a page or two from the Prayer-book was sufficient to satisfy all their parishioners' spiritual needs. Besides this, the good man was aged and infirm, so that even his superficial notions of the duties of his sacred office were almost as rarely put into practice by him as they were sought for by his parishioners

The family at Aspen Garth, and that of Simon Holmes

and one or two others, were in the habit of attending church on the morning of the Sabbath day, mainly from custom and from some respect to the vicar and Sir Godwin, for there was no great antipathy at Thorpe Aspen to the Church as an institution. In the afternoon, however, they generally repaired to the neighbouring town of Chilworth, which was within easy distance, and where there was an evangelic minister who did provide for his hearers 'the true and very bread that feeds the soul.' Both at Aspen Garth and at Simon Holmes's humbler dwelling there was what Paul says of Philemon's—'the church that is in thine house,' and thus the flames of true Christian light and life were kept burning, even in Thorpe Aspen's indifferent and apathetic air.

And so it came to pass that the godly carpenter was looked up to by many, and, sooth to say, was scoffed at by a few, as the spiritual adviser of the villagers, an unsought though by no means irksome or unwelcome vocation, for which Simon's high character, unassuming piety, and strong intelligence peculiarly fitted him. Even those who saw fit to sneer at him, to make a mock at his religion and to call him 'praying Simon,' or 'Simon the psalmist,' in allusion to his poetic proclivities, during their days of health and prosperity, were glad enough in the hour of sickness, death, or adversity to solicit the old carpenter's counsel and prayers, and got besides his kindly sympathy and ever-helpful hand.

"Good evening, Simon," said Mrs. Atheling, as he crossed the threshold a day or two after they had committed Farmer Atheling to his last resting-place, or rather to his last but one, for there could be no question as to his future inheritance in the Land of Rest,—"I'm glad to see you; glad always, kind neighbour; but most glad when, as now, my hearth is shadowed, and my heart is sad. Draw your chair to the fire; or stay, take the ingle nook and my

goodman's chair. He honoured you while he lived, and he would be the first to say, that you will honour it, now he's gone."

The last words provoked, and not unnaturally, both a sigh and a tear.

"Thenk yo'," said Simon, accepting the invitation. "There's something sad i' one's fost look at a vacant chair, an' one thinks 'at them 'at's gone 'll nivver sit there no more. But, I say, Mrs. Atheling, I think that isn't the thowt 'at comes either to you or me aboot him. Where is he sittin' noo? They don't mak' sitch seats doon here, no, nut for kings' palaces."

A faint smile like a sunbeam flitted across the widow's face; flitted back again and sat there, as she responded,

"You are right, Simon. It doesn't seem right, does it, to mourn that one who was so ripe for heaven has gone there, or that while he is praising God for taking him there, we should be complaining because he has not been left here? O dear!" she continued with a sigh, "what a strange mixture life is!"

"Yes, that's true anuff. There's no denyin' it. But there's a vast difference i' life accordingly as it's mixed by us or for us. If we undertak' to mak' it up for ourselves, there's no wonder 'at it gets bad to tak', an hez some awkward effects when it is ta'en. If it's mixed for us ivery day by the Good Physician, things is put into it in a right proportion, an' even when it's nut pleasant it's medicinal, an' the result is perfect health. That's just hoo it is wi' your husband, Mrs. Atheling. Doon here we're offen squeamish an' sickly both i' body an' mind; an' at the best oor souls hev ague fits o' fear an' doot. Noo, Farmer Atheling is i' *perfect health.* He let the good Lord mix the cup of his life for him all the tahme, an' so to-day he stands up before his God as ruddy as David, as strong as Samson, as beautiful as Jesus, an' as his Saviour looks on him an' loves him, He

says, 'Thy faith hath made thee WHOLE!' An' that's hoo you'll see him, Mrs. Atheling, when you see him again."

The widow had already conjured up in her mind, under Simon's stirring words, the picture of her departed treasure as he looked on the happy day of their espousals, and the smile brightened on her face still more as she thought of the coming hour when she should look on that dear face again.

"Thank you, Simon," said she. "You've done my heart good. He shall not return to me, but I shall go to him"

"Nowt so sure, Mrs. Atheling. Nowt so sure, only let Him mix your cup. Don't try either to mak' or to meddle, or to question aboot the prescription or the like o' that. 'My Father's cup, shall I not drink it?' You know Who said that; an' He's bound to work the same merracle of healing upo' you; an' by the grace of God, I'll be there to give yo' both a warm handgrip in the Land of Health!"

CHAPTER IV.

JACOB BENSON, THE GAMEKEEPER, PLAYS WITH EDGED TOOLS; AND SIR GODWIN SPOFFORTH MEETS WITH HIS SUPERIOR.

> "But that from us aught should ascend to heaven
> So prevalent as to concern the mind
> Of God high-blest, or to incline His will,
> Hard to belief may seem, yet this will prayer."
>
> *Milton.*

THROUGH the crisp and bracing air strode Simon Holmes, summoned, as we have seen, to the darkened chamber in which lay the sorely stricken daughter of the lord of Aspen Towers. The sun, even on that late autumn morning, had come forth from his chamber rejoicing as a strong man to run a race, and was now pouring his beams upon the landscape with unstinted grace and with almost a summertide of power. The foliage of the grand old trees in Aspen Chase was brightly burnished by his radiance, and their robes, lately green with summer glory, were now, like the cohorts of Assyria, 'gleaming in purple and gold.'

The morning mist lay on the carpet of greensward in veils of sheeny silver, except in the more open glades where it rose in filmy diaphonous folds, slowly evaporating beneath

the ardent glances of the sun. Here and there the musical matins of the blackbird and the mellow notes of other woodland warblers were heard as if each one 'with sweet delight would greet the morn.' Overhead the blue lift spread far and wide in calm unbroken splendour, for the few thin white clouds that sailed slowly northward before the balmy breeze served only to heighten its calm serenity.

The village carpenter was gifted with a poetic soul, and more than most could interpret Nature's visions and voices, and give them meanings only perceptible to an elevated mind. To him these fair light cloudlets seemed as the wings of the angels of God, 'those ministers of His that do His pleasure,' moving high on missions of beneficence and love; and to him, now and always the whole landscape was eloquent with inspiration, charged with gracious intimations of the presence of his Father and Friend. In him the angels of Faith and Hope were making richer music than any within the compass of the songsters of the grove. Whatever mists of earthly limitations dimmed the brightness of his spiritual vision, these, like the mists around him, were thinning more and more, all silvern in the light of heaven, and surely melting before the glory to be revealed. Happy he, happiest of all men who best can realise that his life-path lies through a Beulah land close bordering on the plains of Immanuel's land.

Such and such like were the thoughts of Simon Holmes as he crossed the park which surrounded the ivy-mantled walls of Aspen Towers. He was startled out of his cogitations by the voice of Jacob Benson the gamekeeper, whose footsteps on the soft greensward had given no token of his approach.

"Mornin', Simon. It's a fine mornin', isn't it?" said he. "Quite like a summer's day. Goin' up to the Hall?"

"Good mornin, 'keeper. It is glorious weather. Yes, I'm goin' to see Miss Ethel. Sir Godwin thinks she's worse."

Jacob Benson the gamekeeper, or 'keeper, as he was called in the local vernacular, was a stout, strong-limbed, middle-sized man of thirty-five. He was clad after the fashion of his tribe in corded breeches, velveteen shooting-jacket with baggy pockets and bright brass buttons; a pair of brown leather leggings; and a pair of laced-up, strong hobnailed boots encased his nether limbs. On his head was a rough-looking cap made of hare skins with the fur outwards. His shot bag and powder flask were slung by a strap across his shoulder, on which lay also the barrel of his fowling piece, the end of the stock resting on the palm of his hand. His dark bushy whiskers, big black eyebrows which met above his nose, together with his somewhat heavy chin and military gait—Jacob had been a soldier—gave him a look of fierceness and sternness not to be denied.

And indeed, Jacob Benson was an awkward customer to tackle, as many a member of the poaching fraternity could testify; and those who did venture on that operation generally came off second best. There was a shrewd sarcastic humour lurking in the 'keeper's eye, and in the faculty of speech, especially when the 'rough side of his tongue' was called into requisition, the hard-headed gamekeeper was quite unmatched in all the valley of Aspendale. Jacob professed to be 'a bit of an infidel,' as he called it, a sort of sceptic on religious subjects. His infidelity, however, like that of many others gifted with much readiness of captious speech, was only skin deep; and Simon Holmes had often pierced it with a home-thrust that not only made him wince, but accomplished a more notable victory in silencing his tongue. Not at all a bad sort of fellow on the whole, this Jacob, as we may chance to know by-and-bye.

"Goin' to see Miss Ethel, are yo'?" said he, drawlingly, in response to Simon's information. "Why I didn't know 'at you'd turned doctor. I heeard 'at Sir Something Somebody,

M.D., was comin' up from London. Mebbe you're goin' to meet him for a consultation."

"Nay, marry," said Simon with a good-humoured laugh. "I should be a fifth wheel to ony cooach o' the sort, no doot. But Miss Ethel wants medicine an' advice from another quarter; an' doctors, more's the pity, even when they are M.D.'s, as you say, aren't offen capable o' givin' the right prescription."

"Deary me!" quoth Jacob, in satiric wonderment, "what a good thing it is that she hez Doctor Simon Holmes handy to mak' up for it."

"Exactly," said Simon, with an emphatic nod, quite content to coincide. "Nut that I'se competent myself to answer her purpose; but she's gotten a notion that I can recommend her to a Good Physician 'at can meet her case, and," continued the carpenter, with an exulting gleam in his grey eye, "I think I can."

"Hey!" quoth the gamekeeper. "That's news! An' who's the doctor? an' what's his medicine? an' what's it for?"

"There's three questions all of a row," said Simon, with a smile, for he felt the opening he had been patiently angling for had now come. "Did you never hear your dear old mother sing,—

> 'My life was sad, my heart was faint,
> Sore was my sin-sick soul;
> But Gilead's balm healed my complaint,
> 'Twas Jesus made me whole'?

All your three questions are answered there, Jacob; and when good old Hannah Benson's son goes to that Physician and gets that medicine, he may hope to be as good and as happy as his mother, and to join her where she's gone when the summons comes. Good mornin', Jacob."

So saying, the carpenter pursued his way to Aspen Towers.

The gamekeeper whistled his two well-trained lurchers to his heels, and went his way to his master's preserves with something to ponder on that made him silent all the way.

"There, Jacob!" said Simon to himself, as he strode along, "I've given you a text; your mother's memory 'll preach the sermon. May your conscience mak' the application."

Arrived at the Hall, Simon was admitted with a hearty welcome by a comely modest-looking maid who had Miss Ethel under her special care.

"Good morning, father," said Nancy Holmes, kissing the old man with much affection. "I *am* so glad you've come, Miss Ethel does want to see you."

"Good morning, Nance, an' God bless yo', dear lassie. It's that 'at can mak' all mornin's good, an' evenin's too, hooiver dark the neet draws roond. What aboot your young mistress? Is she ony better, think yo'?"

Nancy shook her head sadly, and with a grave look on her face, and unbidden tears in her eyes, replied,—

"Worse, father, I think, though she says she's better. I'll go and tell her you are come."

Simon sat in the housekeeper's parlour waiting for Nancy's return; waiting, too, on God the while, for Miss Ethel's sake. On the table lay a New Testament. He turned the pages over, thinking of the sweet young girl who lay overhead on the uttermost border-land between life and death. His eyes caught sight of the words, "Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise."

"And why not?" said Simon aloud. His religion was as downright as his character. He really had what many only profess to have—faith in the Wonder-worker. He could not doubt that He was as near and as ready to stretch forth the hand of power as He ever was in the days of His flesh if He was not hindered now as then, 'because of unbelief.'

With Simon, to think was to act, and at once the cry escaped his lips,—

"Say it, Lord! say it! 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?'" Simon had risen to his feet as if to get a firmer hold on Him with whom Jacob wrestled until break of day. He found Sir Godwin standing before him with a wondering look upon his haggard face.

"Say what, Simon Holmes?" said the baronet. "The death sentence hath been said. All other words come too late. My darling's dying, and I am left without a hope:—without a hope!"

Then the strong man bowed himself; proud as he was the tears fell, and rich as he was he felt himself poor even to beggary in spite of all his wealth. There he stood, the very image of despair.

Honest Simon's sympathies were kindled to a white heat. He looked longingly at the baronet, as though he would fain impart something that was a power in himself. He pointed with trembling finger to the sacred page and read:

"*And behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and when he saw him he fell at his feet:*

"*And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death. I pray thee come and lay thy hands upon her, that she may be healed, and she shall live.*

"*And Jesus went with him. . . There came from the house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead, why troublest thou the Master any further?*

"*As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.*"

"That's it, Sir Godwin! What nonsense it was to say 'Trouble not the Master.' He can't be troubled wi' that sort o' thing. He's only troubled when troubled souls don't come anigh Him. 'Be not afraid, only believe.' The

prayer o' faith shall save the sick. *Shall*, mind you. Who are we, to say it shan't?"

"Read on, Simon," said the baronet, humbly and earnestly, as if he had a personal interest in the result.

Nothing loth, Simon took up the sacred page again and read:

"*And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*

"*And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying.*

"*And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise.*

"*And straightway the damsel arose, and walked, for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment.*"

"But why they should ha' been astonished, *I* don't knoa. It was just like Him. He was the Wonder-worker then; an' I've nivver heeard tell 'at He isn't a Wonder-worker noo. I won't beleeave it. Be not afraid, only believe!"

Sir Godwin Spofforth, Baronet, had no word in reply. He could only stand awe-struck and silent in the presence of the old carpenter's sublime simplicity of faith, and mourn, as he did just then, most truly, that there was no such link between himself and the All-controlling power. He felt strangely constrained to cry, 'Lord, help my unbelief!'

Meanwhile Nancy had come to summon her father to the chamber wherein the sick maiden lay. Simon trod the hall and ascended the wide staircase with the step of a conscious conqueror. He entered the room in which for long and weary months there had been a hand-to-hand struggle between life and death across the fluttering heart of the fair

young girl not yet out of her teens, who, lying there with that dark shadow on her, had sought and found the higher life that can never, never die. He entered the chamber, assured that he should find the Good Physician by her bed, and half expecting to hear the omnipotent TALITHA CUMI then and there!

CHAPTER V.

ETHEL GODWIN FINDS SUNLIGHT IN THE SHADOW; AND SIMON HOLMES EXPRESSES HIS OPINION.

"Aromatic plants bestow
No spicy fragrance while they grow;
But crushed or trodden to the ground,
Diffuse their balmy sweets around."

Goldsmith.

IN a large and richly furnished chamber, surrounded by all the tokens of luxury and wealth, Ethel Spofforth, the fair daughter of a noble house, lay pale and all but helpless in the grip of what the great physician from London himself had acknowledged to be a mysterious disease. For twelve long and weary months the amiable girl had lain upon her bed, held fast in almost every limb by a pitiable paralysis of nerve and muscle, which reduced her to almost infantile dependence upon others. Her mind, ever clear and bright, was, strange to say, still clear and bright, and that even to an unusual degree.

This singular affliction appeared to date from the time when Ethel's mother, a wise and gentle woman, to whom the girl was attached by a love of extraordinary strength, was suddenly snatched out of life by the relentless hand that lays its grasp on all in turn, whether they dwell in castle or

in cot. When Lady Spofforth was being laid in the family vault beneath the chancel floor of the ivy-covered church of Thorpe Aspen, amid all due pomp and pageantry of woe, the loving and gentle Ethel was wrestling with a spasm of grief that locked up or dried the fount of tears. Then it was that this dread affliction seized her; and it had held her in its deathly clasp all the time, up to that bright autumnal morning when Simon Holmes, in response to Ethel's special call, was standing by her bed.

The baronet, shaken to the very centre of his being by this double visitation, had exhausted all the resources of medical skill in his efforts to rescue his darling from the power of the grave. Of her it might be truly said, as of an earlier sufferer, that 'she had suffered many things of many physicians, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.' Nurse after nurse, too, had been tried and found wanting, either in tact, or strength, or sympathy, or patience, or fidelity, until, in order to fill a positive gap in the succession, the strong, sensible, sympathetic daughter of the village carpenter had volunteered her services, and proved herself, as Ethel most gratefully declared, to be worth her 'weight in gold.' Certain it is that in one respect Nancy Holmes had brought her beloved young mistress a good which no gold could buy.

The gospel grace which endows with superior wealth both rich and poor had been the strength of Lady Spofforth's life, and had brought her peace and triumph in the hour of death. She had found Simon Holmes to be 'partaker of like precious faith,' and had long been in the habit of conversing with him occasionally on those sacred subjects which were dear to the souls of both. This fact rendered Nancy Holmes' self-imposed task all the easier, for when that simple village maiden sought to lead her helpless charge to cast herself upon the tender love and pity of her Saviour, she found the young girl's mind and heart pre-

pared both by her sainted mother's teaching and her hearty witness to the intelligent piety of Simon Holmes. And so it came to pass that on her sickbed the fair Ethel was led by Nancy to open her young heart for the incoming and indwelling of the tender and compassionate Friend Divine.

So the light came to Ethel Spofforth. The sacred torch glowing on the hearth of the village carpenter, borne in the hands of a simple serving-maid, kindled the holy flame in the home of rank and wealth. The heiress and her humble servitor were co-heiresses by a genealogy of which no Heralds' College knows the secret; joint owners of a funded property free from all the fluctations of the market; a fair estate unknown to the geographer, unmapped by any survey under the sun; a genealogy which linked them to the Divine; an estate which could never pass from their possession; a fortune which would take a whole eternity to spend.

Since the advent of the gospel light and life into Ethel's chamber, her heavy cross had been borne with an invincible cheerfulness, and in a spirit of such sweet submission that her life was a series of daily sermons on the Christian graces and on the goodness and the faithfulness of Him that placed them there. One great grief, however, still oppressed the suffering girl, a grief so keen, so deep, that her pillow was often wet with tears. Her brother Harold, spurning all paternal counsel, defying all effort at control, had bidden, as it seemed, farewell to all the paths of rectitude and reason; and had embarked on a career so reckless as to threaten himself with near and utter ruin, and his name and family with enduring shame. During his long residence at Oxford he had fallen into evil hands: had now himself become a tempter and misleader of others. His latest success in this sad devilry, had to do with Alfred Atheling, the brother of her friend and sister Clara Atheling, who next to Simon Holmes was of all outsiders most welcome

by her bed. But we have diverged too long and too far, and must now return to Simon Holmes, just admitted to the sick girl's chamber.

"Good mornin', Miss Ethel," said the old carpenter, softly but cheerily, as he took his place beside her bed. He had often been summoned of late to speak wise words of counsel, winsome words of cheer, to the maiden who was supposed even then to be gliding into the valley of the shadow of death, and to pray with her as one whose name was Israel, having 'power like a prince to prevail.'

"Good mornin', Miss Ethel. I can see, even in this shado', that you are better. O Miss Ethel! God offen mak's us to see i' the shadow better than we can see i' the shine. Am I right?"

"You are right in both ways, Simon," said the invalid, quietly and with a smile. "I am better, tho' I can see that those about me are not of the same opinion; and I have seen, and I do see, in this shadowed life of mine, bright visions and rich gleams, such as I never saw in the sunshine, and such as I cannot describe."

"I know," said Simon, as though he and she were living much on the same plane. "Unspeakable things which it isn't lawful for man to utter, eh? That's hoo Paul felt when he was caught up into the third heaven. Do you know, I think some tahmes 'at he wasn't really cowt up at all, but that i' some of his 'perils' an' 'watchin's' an' sitch like, when his troubles was ten times woss then common, his gracious Lord just gav' him a rush o' compensation an' joy, so that whether he was i' the body or oot of it, he couldn't tell. I've felt a good deal like it myself some tahmes. A tremendous big wave comes like a green monster, all froonin' wi' foam, but it only lifts the ship up, up, up, an' the crew get a better sight o' the blue owerhead, an' o' the haven where they would be."

"Well, Simon, I don't feel as though I have many 'perils'

and troubles of my own. At least I can say, 'His grace is sufficient for me.' But O, Simon Holmes! My poor, poor brother Harold! It seems as though I can do nothing but pray for him, all the day and all the wakeful night. I was doing that when you came in."

"Was yo' noo?" said Simon, forgetting his grammar, and lapsing into broad vernacular, as he always did when he was greatly stirred. "But, I say, Miss Ethel, there's them 'at says it's all a pack o' nonsense: an' when we come to look at it, by t' leet o' reason, they must be right."

"Whatever do you mean, Simon?" said Ethel, opening her eyes in wonder.

"Why, all this prayin' for fooaks an' things. It's all a fancy an' a delusion. That poor fayther, the ruler o' the synagogue, he didn't get much, did he, when he prayed so hard an' wi' so mony tears for his little dowter? That poor woman up Sidon way, that prayed for a few crumbs from under the table, found her poor sick lassie as bad as iver when she got home again, didn't she? an' when a poor sister like Mary went weepin' to Jesus aboot her brother, it wasn't a bit o' use was it? Noo, why is it, think yo', 'at you an' me can't just be content to believe 'at this world an' all that's in it is just under a hap-hazard, happy-go-lucky, an' sadly-go-unlucky gover'ment o' chance?"

"Because we know better, Simon," said the patient and peaceful sufferer, her face irradiated with a smile not born of earth.

"Hey, dear soul, that's just where it is. We *knoa*. Them 'at talks i' that way may raise doots an' questions, an' stummle at this, an' boggle at that, an' give t' other the go-by; but it's because they don't *knoa*. The secret o' the Lord is wi' them that fear Him, an' them 'at hezn't it's o' no more use in a witness-box on that subject then a blinnd man on a question o' colour, or a deaf man in a dispute aboot t' comparative sweetness of a fiddle an' a bugle-horn.

We *knoa*, as you say, an' you an' me 'll just go on trustin' an' prayin' an' waitin' on Him 'at says, 'Call on me in the day of trouble, an' I will deliver thee' He either means it or He doesn't. If He doesn't, why there's nowt for it but just to shut up t' Bible an' drift doon i' the dark. But if He does, then He means it oot an' oot, an' t' biggest faith 'll fetch the biggest blessing from the throne of God. O Miss Ethel, Miss Ethel! Neither your prayers nor mine can stop midway on the rooad te Heaven. They're winged wi' faith that's stranger than an eagle's wing, an' accordin' to oor faith it shall be done. Mr Harold's within the reach of his sister's God, an' it's my belief that his sister 'll live to fetch him home!"

A faint blush of excitement overspread Ethel's pale cheeks as she listened to the old carpenter's hopeful words. With the simplicity and calm of a trusting child she clasped her thin white hands, raised her large blue eyes, that had a holy light in them, to heaven, and softly prayed,

"Father in Heaven! Grant it in thy mercy, for my Saviour's sake!"

"Amen!" said Simon. "Amen, Lord, so be it!" And it seemed to both that the sanction of the King was set like a seal to their united prayer.

Even while Simon spoke, the baronet's carriage, which had been to Chilworth Station to fetch the great physician, drew up at the door of Aspen Towers. Kneeling by the bedside, Simon besought a blessing on the doctor's visit, and retired with the words upon his lips that he had read to Sir Godwin from the Divine Book, —

"Lord, come and lay Thy hands upon her, that she may be healed, and she shall live."

Simon Holmes made haste homeward through the park. The sun was high in the heavens, its rays were gilding brightly the many-coloured foliage of oak and beech, and birch and sycamore, investing them with a more excellent

glory in their season of decay than ever they had worn in the quickening spring-time, or the strong summer-tide of life. Just so, thought Simon, hath the Sun of Righteousness made the weak and helpless maiden 'most beautiful, most fair,' when most near the winter-time of death. Then he thought of the man of skill, standing, it might be, even then by the sick girl's bed, and there and then the good man stood and bared his head, and linking himself by faith to the throne of Him that kindles and sustains the sun's great heart of fire, he prayed aloud :—

"Shine down, O Sun! Shine into that darkened chamber! O Sun of Righteousness, arise with healing in thy wings!"

Then pursuing his way, he found himself unconsciously repeating the words he had read to the silent and wondering Sir Godwin :—

"And He took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi, which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment."

"Yes," said the old carpenter, as he involuntarily quickened his steps in answer to the growing lightness of his heart, a beaming smile resting on his face the while, "Yes, He hesn't given up astonishin' fooaks yet. The Lord nivver put that glorious little story i' the Book to mock poor weepin' parents with a sheer impossibility; or to mak' 'em wonder why He doesn't do sitch things noo; or to mak' 'em wish 'at they'd lived i' them times i'stead o' these. It's there with a purpose. If oor faith hez no mair strength in it than a strand of untwisted tow, we limit Him an' hamper Him, an' rob oorselves o' mony an' mony a famous blessin'; but if we wad let Him spin us a seven-twined rope o' faith, an' then pull with a will an' a nivver-leave-off-till-we-get-it, He would astonish us, He

would astonish us with a great astonishment. Nowt so sure!"

"Well, Simon," said Rebecca, as she greeted him at the door. "What do yo' think o' the poor gell? Hez the great doctor come?"

"Yes, 'Becca, the Greatest of All doctors is there; an' it's my belief," said Simon, with an emphasis on every word, "that He hez said, or will say, 'Talitha cumi.'"

"O Simon! That *will* be astonishin'," said Rebecca, with eyes glistening with tears, for she, at any rate, had faith in Simon's word.

"Just what I've been sayin'," said he, "that's the Wonder-worker's way."

CHAPTER VI.

ALFRED ATHELING GOES IN PURSUIT OF PLEASURE; AND POLICEMAN TUGWELL COMES IN PURSUIT OF HIM.

"I'll read you matter deep and dangerous;
As full of peril and adventurous spirit,
As to o'erwalk a current, roaring loud,
On the unsteadfast footing of a spear."

Shakespeare.

"NOW, Alf, my boy, what 'gay and festive scene' are we to make more gay and festive by our presence and patronage to-night? Neither you nor I can stand this dreary den with only our two sweet selves to provide the entertainment."

"The fact is indisputable, Hal; the question, thine own superior wit shall answer."

"Then I vote for the Haymarket first; and then an adjournment to Evans's for supper. First the light fantastic, then the feast of cutlets and the flowing bowl. Then home in the small hours of the morning. Does the programme please your own particular palate?"

"Perfectly, my alliterative comrade; it promises positive pleasure. 'Youth at the prow, and pleasure at the helm,' can scarcely float on fairer seas, or into a more congenial harbour; and so—

'Weel may the keel row, the keel row,
Weel may the keel row, that my Harold's in.'"

That was the kind of conversation with which Harold Spofforth and Alfred Atheling sought to beguile the leaden hours, to 'kill the enemy,' as they called it, as they sat in their London lodgings in a side street abutting from the Strand. At that very time Widow Atheling was sitting sadly by her hearthstone, and Ethel Spofforth was lying helpless on her bed at peaceful Thorpe Aspen.

The room in which the two young men were seated, though somewhat dingy and in ill repair, was large and commodious. Its elaborate cornices and finely carven mantelpiece gave evidence of the wealth and position of its occupants in those earlier times, when that was quite an aristocratic region, and when the silver Thames that flowed close by was really deserving of the name.

Harold Spofforth was the only son of Sir Godwin Spofforth, and the heir of Aspen Towers. He was a young man of about five and twenty years of age, though he might well have passed for thirty, for those sure and rapid defacers, Immorality and Excess, had already begun to fix their ominous imprint on his face. His hair, of an almost raven black, shaded a brow that indicated considerable intellectual ability; but the dark moustache upon his lip could not hide the lines about the mouth which told of dominant passions and strong self-will; and the rich brown eyes were lighted with very questionable fires. He was attired in ultra-fashionable garb, and was not by any means improved in his personal appearance by those marked peculiarities of the tailor's art. The old saying that it takes nine tailors to make a man is foolish enough, but ninety times nine would be insufficient to make a man of the unmanly with all the resources of sartorial skill to help them in the effort.

His companion, somewhat younger than he, bore all the tokens of his Saxon origin. The Athelings of Aspen Garth were able to boast, at least so it was affirmed, that through a long line of Saxon yeomen they were descended from that

unfortunate prince Edward Atheling who was jostled out of all chance of succession to the English throne by William the Norman and the swarm of bold, imperious barons that followed in his train. An open, winsome, and even handsome face was that of Alfred Atheling, a face upon which you scarce could look without feeling something of love and liking for its owner. His light complexion, pale enough as he sits there with his fair blue eyes fixed upon his comrade, would have been ruddy if he had had the wit to be content with a home on bonny Aspendale. Those eyes indicated real amiability of disposition, and there was that in them and also in the arched eyebrows, the broad forehead, the slightly 'tip-tilted' nose and smiling mouth which denoted ready humour and quick perception. But there was evident also a certain pliability and indecision that would surely lead to grave results, if he came under the influence of a subtler spirit and a stronger will. He wore a profusion of light and curly auburn hair; and his was, taken altogether, one of those physiognomies which warrant its possessor to be 'good company,' a capital comrade; an acquisition in social circles where listeners are many and good talkers few.

The conversation of which I have just given a specimen, continued for a while in the same strain. The actors and actresses of the day were criticised and jested on; their own later escapades were reverted to and laughed at; certain impending races were discussed, and certain projects entertained which promised them a new sensation. Then the misguided pair sallied out into the dimly lighted streets and from thence into the brightness and glitter of the theatre, at which operatic burlesque was much in vogue just then. Then followed an adjournment to the supper table and the billiard-room; and from thence, long after the midnight hour had struck, back to the side street off the Strand with flushed cheeks and staggering gait, with lightened purses

and confused wits, to seek their pillows and reproduce the misspent hours in troubled and excited dreams.

And this was their poor estimate of pleasure. This is the poor, mean estimate of pleasure held by thousands of dupes as foolish and as reckless as they!

In the morning they rose with aching heads, listless limbs, with deep dark rings around their dull eyes, the victims of lassitude and nausea begotten of the 'pleasure' of the previous night. Harold Spofforth, spoiled child of fortune, had neither need nor duty before him to rouse him to exertion. He toiled not, neither did he spin,—which was all the worse for him. Surely there is not a more miserable being than a young man of fortune who has nothing to do but to find some new way of doing nothing; and to what dangers is not such an idler exposed! The bird that sits is easily shot; the flier escapes the fowler. 'Idleness,' says quaint old Quarles, 'is the Dead Sea that swallows all the virtues, and is the self-made sepulchre of the living man.'

In the case of Alfred Atheling, matters were somewhat different. He had both need and duty to stir him into action; but alas! in this case, the sitting bird acted only too successfully as a lure. In order to understand this young man's present position we must retrace our steps a little. He and Harold Spofforth had not only known each other from childhood, but they had studied together at the same Oxford College. The Athelings farmed their own freehold, and as that was somewhat extensive, a college education for Alfred who had a strong objection and distaste to a farmer's life, was well within the compass of their means. Through Harold's influence he had obtained the position of a tutor to the only son of a man of wealth. The pupil died, and the father, won by Alfred's charm of manner, his unquestionable accomplishments, and especially

by the way in which he had won the sympathy and esteem of his dead boy, made him his private secretary.

Hudson Harvey, Esq., was not only a popular M.P. but a fairly successful author, and was also one of the principals of a large banking firm of great repute. Alfred's duties at certain seasons of the year were onerous enough but not irksome, and on occasions he had a good deal of that very valuable, but dangerous commodity, spare time on his hands. Harold Spofforth's loose tendencies had been strongly developed while at Oxford. More than once, or twice or thrice, he had been in peril of expulsion; when he subsequently came up to London, these had full swing. He soon found his college chum, who welcomed his presence in the great city as giving promise of pleasant companionship, and the welcome was all the heartier by reason of the gratitude which the young man honestly felt for the good service he had rendered him. Being flush of money, genial of manner, subtle of speech, and strong of will, Harold Spofforth had no great difficulty in leading the young man along those pleasant and flower-bordered slopes which grow steeper as men go, and which lead direct to ruin, whatever of mirth and music may enliven and charm the way.

And so it came to pass that in course of time Mr. Hudson Harvey had to complain of Alfred's irregularity, of his treacherous memory, of his untimely absences, and even of discrepancies and deficiencies in his accounts. At last, with all his patience and goodwill to the young man, he told him that he would no longer endure it, and warned him that he would have to vacate his post. When Alfred told his friend Harold of his impending dismissal that dangerous companion was flushed with wine, had been planning an excursion to Paris, and, moreover, had in his pocket a parental cheque for a considerable amount of money.

"Never mind old Harvey, Alf. I know *he* was fond

enough of sowing his wild oats when he was a young fellow," he said. "You let the old curmudgeon go. It's no gold mine that you are losing after all. Come and lodge with me awhile. We'll have a holiday, and make a trip across the briny. Something better than scribbling at his table will turn up, by-and-bye. *I* can keep the ball rolling. Let us make hay while the sun shines, and enjoy life while we are young." And then he sang—

"If Fortune with a smiling face
Strew roses on our way,
When shall we stoop to pick them up?
To-day, my friend, to-day.
But should she frown with face of care,
And talk of coming sorrow,
When shall we grieve, if grieve we must?
To-morrow, friend, to-morrow."

Queer kind of 'hay' that was that Harold Spofforth had in view in his misapplication of a proverb that might well have rebuked them both. When 'wild oats' are recklessly sown, the crop to be reaped is not hay, but noxious swathes of weeds whose malarial vapours are rife with moral fever ague, and death!

Such was the state of Alfred Atheling's fortunes on the morning that I have referred to. The results of the debauch of the previous evening had altogether unfitted him for his duties; a splitting headache and an unusual dizziness made it almost impossible for him to sit upright. He felt that he could not go to business, and so he wrote a hasty note to his employer, and despatched it by a special messenger, excusing his non-appearance by pleading 'severe indisposition.'

The young men were sat at a mid-day lunch; Alfred had somewhat recovered, thanks, as he said, to 'a hair of the dog that bit him,' which in this case was a synonym for a glass or two of champagne, when the serving-maid entered the

room, instantly after she had given a warning tap, and said with a flurried look and in an excited tone,

"There's a p'liceman a-talkin' to Missis, an' I heard him asking for a Mr. Alfred Atheling, as he was awantin' of."

"A policeman!" said Alfred, turning red and then white again. "None of your jokes, Harriet."

"No, sir. It's no joke, I'm sorry to say," said the prompt official, who had entered unperceived. "I am sorry to give you any trouble, sir, or to spoil your dinner, but you must come with me."

The policeman spoke quietly and respectfully enough, but the words fell on the ear of Alfred Atheling like the knell of doom. He lifted his dazed eyes to the policeman's face, but for the life of him he could not get his tongue to shape the question, 'What for?'

Not that the young fellow was in anywise a coward, except in the sense that Shakespeare uses the words, when he says that 'conscience makes cowards of us all.' He knew that he had done wrong; that he had done many wrongs, but he was not conscious that he had done anything which would bring him under the strong grip of the law. He could not be very sure, however, even about that, for latterly he had so often given way to the temptations of the wine-cup, that that insidious enemy which dethrones the reason and 'steals men's brains' had again and again despoiled him of the power of self-government. That, however, which now arrested him in a far more peremptory fashion than the respectful policeman had done, that which laid its iron grip on his heart and conscience just then was the thought of his mother and of the blameless name of Atheling, hitherto nobly worn and honourably borne by a stout-hearted, high-spirited, clean-handed Saxon race.

"What do you mean, sir?" said Harold Spofforth, sternly and haughtily, as he turned to the invader of their privacy.

"What right have you to enter into *my* private apartments after this fashion?"

But it is of very little use 'riding the high horse' in a tilting-match against the authority of the law. The policeman was put upon his mettle, and all the answer he got from the man in blue was that he meant 'just what he said.'

At last Alfred himself managed to falter out, "Upon what charge?"

"For himbezzlement from your employer, 'Udson 'Arvey, Esq., Hem. Pee.," said the policeman, who with regard to the use of the aspirate was evidently a 'law unto himself.' "If I were you," he continued. "I wouldn't say hanything about it, for whatever you do say will be produced as hevidence."

Alfred saw the wisdom of this advice and was silent. He was a good deal fluttered too, and had good reason for being so. He knew that, more than once or twice, his master had discovered and forgiven serious discrepancies in money matters. In no case had he intended any wrong: but he very reasonably imagined that his employer had discovered some still more serious flaw, and he was proportionately troubled as to what might be the result. He felt that there was nothing for it but to do the policeman's bidding, and so he set about making ready for his compulsory departure, feeling just about as miserable as a man could be.

CHAPTER VII.

POLICE CONSTABLE TUGWELL GETS INTO DIFFICULTIES; AND NED SALTMER ACTS THE PART OF A GOOD SAMARITAN.

"Sir, I do give you welcome to my house,
There find you shelter till the storm is done;
'Tis true its low walls hold no luxuries,
Yet hold they homely fare and kindly hearts."
Fletcher.

BUT though Alfred Atheling saw no course open except to go with the policeman who had come on so unpleasant an errand, Harold for several reasons was indisposed to permit matters to come to such an issue. He very bluntly and very foolishly made offer of a golden bribe, which the policeman even more bluntly refused.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he, "Jim Tugwell isn't made of that sort o' stuff. And let me tell you that you are doing your friend no good by makin' such a hoffer. It'll 'ave to come out in hevidence, and it's just the sort o' thing to knock a extra nail in his coffin; leastwise," he continued, seeing Alfred's pitiable look, and thinking that the metaphor was needlessly strong, "leastwise, it's likely to 'ammer another rivet in his chain. I've got to do my duty, and I call upon you to 'elp me in the name of the law. I've got

a search warrant, too. I 'ope you won't make hany difficulties. Whatever facilities you give will tell in the prisoner's favour."

"O certainly," said Harold, with a smile, his mood suddenly changing. He was conscious that he had made a great mistake in offering money, but was by no means disposed to give up the game. The fact is that he had serious doubts about Alfred's innocence; such is the natural effect of comradeship in wrong-doing; and somewhat selfishly thought of its probable effect on his own liberty of action. "O certainly," said he, "there's the bed-room, make yourself quite at home."

As the constable turned himself to enter into that apartment, Harold managed to slip a bank-note into Alfred's hand, and accompanied the action by a hasty glance at the door. Alfred understood its meaning, and without waiting to ask himself as to the prudence of the step, resolved, if possible, to make his escape.

"I suppose we may go with you, policeman," said he calmly, though his nerves were at their full tension.

"Say *must*, if *you* please," said Tugwell. "I shan't lose sight of you." Then with a self-satisfied smile as of one who thoroughly understands his business and is not to be caught napping, he proceeded to the bedroom, his prisoner behind him and Harold bringing up the rear.

"My boxes are in that dressing-room," said Alfred, handing some keys to his captor with a submissive air, as who should say, "I see resistance is of no use." The policeman passed into the dressing-room followed by Harold, who had changed places with his friend.

No sooner were the two well within the smaller room than Alfred pulled the door to, turned the double lock, put the key in his pocket; and with the angry shout of the policeman in his ear, sprang on to the landing, and, overturning the listening Harriet, rushed down stairs. His hat and

coat were hung handily in the hall, and in a few moments he was walking with well-assumed quiet of deportment among the crowds that trod the pavement of the noisy Strand!

An omnibus happened to be drawn up to the pavement with ready-opened door, through which a passenger had just alighted. Alfred jumped in and rode some distance before it occurred to him to think as to what part of the metropolis it was going. When he saw on it the name of the Victoria Park, he was well content to go thither, as he felt that he could not do better than to get away from the West End with what speed he could, and that the East End promised him safer shelter until such times as he could decide what it was best to do. When the omnibus arrived at the corner of the Park, he got out and set himself to look for some quiet and not much frequented coffee-house where he might sit awhile, with a cup of coffee as a reason, and try to collect his scattered wits.

"What a fool I am!" was the first result of his cogitations. "I have made matters worse instead of better by running away. I had far better have confronted the difficulty like a man. My flight is in itself a condemnation."

Then he began to wonder what it was all about, and whether it was his absence from his duties on that day which had set Mr. Harvey against him, and induced him to gather up all his past delinquencies and punish him therefor. Then came the thought of the shame and disgrace of a public appearance at a police court; the thought of all his misdoings coming out in examination, and appearing in the public prints; the thought that things were very likely more black against him than he knew, for he had to acknowledge that this was possible, so utterly forgetful and indifferent had he latterly become.

"But there must be something special," said he to himself in a dazed way, "or Mr. Harvey would never have

taken such a step as that. Let me try to piece together the events of the last few days." At last it dawned upon him; and the truth made his face more pallid than before. Two days before. Mr. Harvey had intrusted him with a bag of money to take to his usual bank. What had he done with it? Did he take it there? For the life of him he could not tell. Had he lost it? Had it gone as his own money had too often gone, in losses by gambling? For the last few days he had been living on excitement, had been almost all the time under the influence of wine, or in that dull dazed state that follows excess. So the answer to all his self-questionings on the subject was, simply and literally, that he could not tell.

His knife and fork dropped from his fingers,—he was making a poor pretence at a make-believe meal. He sat with widely-open eyes and equally widely-open mouth, staring across the table. So far as he was concerned, he was staring into vacancy, but a decent looking workman, who was discussing a frugal meal directly opposite, came to the not unnatural conclusion that the stare was meant for him.

"I say, mate," said the man, familiarly, but not rudely "if you're opening your mouth for your food, you'd better take up your knife and fork again. It'll never jump in of itself; an' if you are openin' your eyes so wide to look at me, why then,—beggin' your pardon, I'm a bit narvous."

"I beg your pardon—indeed I do," said Alfred. "I really did not know what I was doing."

"O, it's all right," said the man, "there's no harm done. But, 'scuse me, you seem to be a good deal put out about something. Let us hope it's nowt serious."

"Nowt." The familiar word, honest East Yorkshire for nothing, caught Alfred's attention, and sent his disturbed and over-active mind spinning away at lightning speed right off to peaceful Aspendale. He conjured up the silver-haired widow sitting in the ingle-nook at Aspen Garth. He

thought of the father, the noble, manly, tender-hearted father now lying beneath the yew-trees in Thorpe Aspen churchyard. He was overcome by the rush of feeling acting on his strained nerve and excited mind; he flung his arms upon the table, buried his face upon them, and sobbed aloud; sobbed as only strong men can sob when their hearts are sad and sore within them.

"I say, mate," said the honest Yorkshireman, rising to his feet and putting his hand upon the young man's shoulder, "I'm, I'm awfully sorry. I didn't mean to—to—confoond it all, ah can't stand this, yo' knoa! It isn't i' human natur'. If a poor chap like me can sarve yo' a good turn, give us the tip, an' you're as welcome as wages on a Setterda' neet."

There was real sympathy in the workman's tones; there was real heart, both in the matter and the manner of his talk; there was an evident honesty in his proffer which went straight to the young man's heart. It will be noticed that, as his feelings got the better of him, the man slipped into the full dialect of his boyhood; and this to Alfred was so redolent with mellow memories that he felt inclined to trust him so far, at anyrate, as was required to secure himself a decent shelter and maybe a temporary home. While all this was passing through his mind, and the while he was bravely struggling to recover self-command, he continued silent. His companion spoke again.

"I'll tell yo' what it is, sir. There's a mighty great deal o' sorrow an' trouble, an' bother of all sorts i' this great big ovver-grown London, that's worse to bear twenty times over, because there's nobody to tell it to. Seems to me that London's made up of three or four million odd 'uns, an' every one goes spinnin' between his own pegs like tow on a rope-walk an' can nivver get ony nearer to his neighbour. The fact is, I've felt it so myself a thoosand times, an' I've said mony an' mony a time that if ony body i' trouble comes i' my way, I'll give 'em a chance, ony how, to mak' a friend

if they want one. If they don't, why nobody's no worse, an' what's well meant should be well ta'en. Hev I said owt wrong?"

"No, indeed," said Alfred, trying to raise a smile which was loth to come at call. "The fact is," he continued, looking frankly in the workman's face, "I'm under a cloud, and I need a quiet shelter until the storm blows over. I am not without means, however, and can afford to pay moderately for what I want. Can you direct me to any quiet corner of that kind?"

The man looked at him a few moments without speaking, looked at him earnestly, so much so that Alfred felt that he could not much longer keep his eyes uplifted. Then he said, in the same bluff, honest, straightforward way.

"Now then, honour bright, mate; that there cloud that you're talkin' of,—is it one o' your own partic'lar brewin' up?"

"Yes," said Alfred, with a sigh.

"'Scuse me, sir," persisted he, most respectfully, "an' don't be offended, 'cause no offence is intended. I've a wife an' three bairns to think on—Ha' you gone an' been an' put yourself in the wrong box wi' the law? I mean so far as committin' a—a—you know what I mean?"

"Not that I know of," answered Alfred truthfully enough. "Not that I know of, so help——"

"Nay, nay, don't put it i' that way," interrupted his companion, firmly and quickly. "'Cordin' to my notions, words like them as you was a-goin' to say, doesn't as a rule help to mak' things truer or straighter,—t'other way, *I* think. Well, it's just here. I've a room to spare, bedroom an' sittin'-room all i' one. Will you come an' see it?"

Alfred assented. As they went along his companion said with a smile,

"I won't ask you to tell me your name, as you're 'under a cloud,' an' you might think it inconvenient to *hear* it."

Alfred winced under the whip, and half wondered if the speaker knew how keenly it cut.

"I dare say," continued the man, "you'll prefer to pay for your room in advance. You won't think onything o' my mentionin' that. It's only fair it should be so, 'cause then it can do no harm for you to hev your own way aboot that. I don't mind tellin' you mine. It's Ned Saltmer, but I'm generally called 'Yorkie' by my mates. You see, that's the shire I hail from; an' accordin' to *my* opinion, it's about the best quarter there is *to* hail from. Them that hails from some other county may differ from me about that. an' of coorse I lets 'em. It wouldn't be kind to do otherwise, 'cause, don't you see, that's their misfortune an' not their fault."

"I'm Yorkshire too," said Alfred. who thought he might safely make that admission, quite sure that it would tell in his favour with Ned Saltmer.

"Well, noo, I'd come to that conclusion already, to tell you the truth," said Ned, with a knowing smile, "an' I don't mind ownin' that it sort o' paved the way. My wife's Lancashire, bred an' born. Of coorse it isn't so good as bein' Yorkshire, but as I tell her, it's next best thing to it, an' being married to a Yorkshireman mak's her Yorkshire as near as owt. Sometimes when she's i' the humour for a joke *she* calls me 'Yorkie' as my mates do, and so then I calls her 'Lankie.' I can't say as it suits her exactly, for the dear lass isn't much higher than a plumb-line, an' she's almost as plump and jolly as the bob at the end on it."

By this time they had entered a street consisting altogether of workmen's dwellings, which were evidently inhabited by a thrifty and respectable class of artisans. Ned Saltmer stopped at the door of a tidy cottage at the lower end of the street. He let himself and his companion in by the aid of a latch-key. Alfred was shown into a small but remarkably clean room, a combination of sitting and bed-room, and was

relieved and comforted to find so clean and homely a port from the storm which had driven him into those remote quarters. He paid the first week's rent, for which Ned wrote him out in a big round hand a receipt. He was able to feel a little amused as he dicovered that it was made out to Mr. Abel Anderson, and said to himself that his initials were left to him intact. He was then left to ponder on the blind alley into which his fortunes had been brought by his own folly and sin.

But what did Ned Saltmer mean by saying to his plump and cheerful spouse in a half whisper when he went into the kitchen,—

"Madge, owd gell, if ever that youngster should be inquired for, put 'em off the scent till I can see 'em myself. He don't know me, but I know he, an' what'll come on't we shall see. That's poetry, Madge, both rhyme *and* reason. Give me a kiss; an' get a bit o' supper ready for him an' us. Here's the brass."

So saying, Ned laid down the silver he had received by way of rent, and sitting in the chimney corner proceeded to enjoy his pipe.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAROLD SPOFFORTH STRIKES A BLOW FOR LIBERTY; AND ALFRED ATHELING HAS DREAMS OF HOME.

"When liberty is gone,
Life grows insipid and has lost its relish;
Therefore, my soul, rise thou to thine occasion,
And strike a blow for liberty."

Beaumont.

IT would be impossible to depict the look of disgust and vexation which was imprinted on the face of the policeman when he found himself shut up in the dressing-room like a rat in a trap. He had entered it on the strength of his search-warrant, but that was by no means strong enough to secure his exit. It certainly would not be profitable to reproduce the expressions, far more strong than elegant, which fell from his lips as he vainly endeavoured to undo the door, that he might give chase to the fugitive, who, like Reynard with the hounds behind him, had 'gone away.'

The simple truth is that Constable Tugwell was in a towering passion. There was that in his eye which warned his fellow-prisoner that the old proverb, 'Least said, soonest mended,' applied with remarkable aptness to the present occasion. So Harold Spofforth contented himself with

looking the strong surprise which he certainly did not feel, and with expressing his opinion that the disordered lock was likely to give them a good deal of trouble before they passed out of bondage into freedom.

"It's my opinion that it is hall a plant," said the policeman gruffly. "I believe that you know a good deal more about this than you're willing to let hout. What a confounded hass I was to give you such a chance!"

"I wish you would let *me* out," said Harold with a sarcastic smile. "I will not dispute your judgment concerning yourself."

This was more than the mortified policeman could endure. He sprung to his feet.

"I shall take you into custody as a confederate!" said he. "I'll make you suffer for it as sure as my name's Tugwell." Again he tugged at the door with a vigour that gave him double right to wear his name.

"All right. We'll see about that," said Howard, coolly. "But let me render you some assistance now, at any rate."

Adding his remarkable muscular strength to that of the policeman, the one holding the brass knob, and the other grasping the old-fashioned handle such as are often found in ancient houses, they gave a violent wrench at the door. The socket into which the bolt was shot suddenly gave way, the door opened upon them, and both of them tumbled pell-mell upon the floor. Policeman Tugwell fell uppermost, and a sudden inspiration seized the bold guardian of the peace. His prisoner should not escape; that he was resolved upon. He set himself to pinion his unwilling comrade, that he might march him off to durance. Such a proceeding, he thought, would go far to balance his loss of *prestige* at headquarters, when it should be known that Alfred Atheling had escaped.

But this time Tugwell had reckoned without his host, and it was soon evident that he had caught a Tartar. It was

not for nothing that the young heir of Aspen Towers had been stroke-oar at the University, and had varied his college studies by gaining instruction in the science of fisticuffs. The fight was long and the struggle was severe. Policeman Tugwell was desperate, and Harold, now as passionate as he, was fully determined not to run the risk of a compulsory appearance before a magistrate. As I have already said, he had a superfluity of reasons for avoiding any such unpleasant interview; and the present charge of abetting Alfred Atheling's escape gave him an additional reason for preferring the sweets of liberty.

And so they fought upon the floor, tooth and nail, as the saying is, though the expression must not be taken literally. The policeman got the worst of it, though he fought bravely and tried to hold his own, as the members of that excellent force well know how to do. The passionate quarrel was conducted in a sort of deadly silence. The inquisitive Harriet had been ordered by her mistress to descend to her own legitimate domain, the kitchen, so that they were not liable to interference, especially as the landlady was deaf and aged, and remained entirely oblivious to the deadly fray that was proceeding overhead.

At length a well, or ill,-aimed blow from Harold's fist brought the policeman's head in violent contact with the floor, and rendered him insensible. Then Harold thought it expedient to retire from the field. Leaving his defeated antagonist to the chapter of accidents, he rapidly attended to his own personal appearance, gathered together his valuables, and, as his young comrade had done some little time before, left the scene of quarrel and the place of danger with all the speed he could.

Without pause, and with but little compunction as to leaving Alfred Atheling in the lurch, Harold Spofforth fled to Spain, that favoured and favouring spot, where for want of an Extradition Act the breakers of English law may abide

in safety. He had no difficulty in making his escape, for a golden key judiciously applied with freedom, constancy, and care, is as good as the celebrated 'Sesame' of the "Arabian Nights," and flings wide all the doors that bar the owner's way.

It might have been thought that he would scarcely have gone so far away without first having some thought for his young 'friend;' but an immoral life is apt to be the death of all the manlier attributes of human nature, and Harold Spofforth's one object was to get himself 'out of the scrape,' as he put it, and if that involved leaving Alfred to his fate, why it could not be helped. The fact is that true and genuine friendship cannot be formed on the lines of wrong doings. Each one knows that the other's want of principle may be, and is likely to be, evidenced towards himself whenever self-interest points that way.

"I can do him no good if I stay," said Harold to himself; "besides, I cannot tell where he is hiding: and he is well able to take care of himself."

So off he went, giving an admirable illustration of the 'elevating and humanising influence' which, it is claimed by a writer on the subject, is produced upon its votaries by the sentimental heroics of the stage.

> "Where you are liberal of your loves and counsels,
> Be sure you be not loose; for those you make your friends
> And give your hearts to, when they once perceive
> The least rub in your fortunes, fall away
> Like water from ye, never found again."

It was not the first or second time that Harold had visited Madrid. That renowned city of gay cavaliers and fair ladies had special charms for him—much to his disadvantage alike in money and morals. Of money he had the run of a great deal more than was good for him; of morals, he had not, at this period of his career, very much to boast

of, and the course he was pursuing was likely enough to bring them to a vanishing point.

He took Paris on his way, and could not refrain from whetting his appetite in that city of vain frivolities and sensual delights, for that peculiar sort of 'pleasure' which he followed as his chief good. He felt compelled, however, to be careful as to his identity, especially after reading in an English newspaper a highly varnished statement of his struggle with policeman Tugwell. It was headed "A Murderous Attack on a Policeman," and bore internal evidence that it had been written or inspired by the doughty constable himself. He was not slow to take warning, and to make his way to a place of safety until the 'storm had blown over.'

That was the way in which he put it. His life and the lives of such as he are spent in raising storms, storms fierce or perilous, except at such times as they are shrinking and hiding from their self-raised tempests, or lying athwart in shame and misery, blown down, down, by the currents their own sin and folly have let loose.

Nor were matters in a much more satisfactory state with Alfred Atheling. That misguided youth was still in hiding in the house of Ned Saltmer the joiner, in the neighbourhood of Victoria Park. It was his fortune, too, to see his flight recorded in a daily paper, which, however, had misspelt his name, and in which his personal description was very inexact. There was small comfort in that. *He* knew to whom it referred; and as his eye fell on the heading,—"Absconded!" he felt how frail was the tenure on which he held his liberty; and, which must be said in his favour, how foully and wickedly he had treated his widowed mother, and the hitherto spotless name he bore.

For many an hour he sat thinking, thinking. He remembered being intrusted by his employer with a large sum of money. He remembered also that it was on the

morning of a day when he and Harold were in company; a day on which he was set free to attend some special revel: a day, alas! one of the many days on which the reins of reason were dropped on the neck of the steed of passion, which galloped headlong with its reckless rider into shameful intemperance and collapse. He remembered all this, but what had become of the money, that he could not remember, rack and search his memory as he might.

Of one thing he was sure,—he had not stolen the money, and had never any intention of so doing. But there were three hard, awkward, damning facts. He had given his employer repeated and serious cause of complaint; the money now missing had been in his charge; and he had 'absconded' as soon as the deficit was discovered. More and more the truth came home to him that he had been a fool in so doing.

"Well, I cannot help it now!" he said to himself. "It is my fate, I suppose. Whom the gods intend to destroy, *et cetera*, and as destruction seems likely enough to be the ultimate issue, dementia has set in accordingly."

It is curious, very, how many people there are who bear hardly upon fate, and condemn its cruelty, who ought to read 'folly' for 'fate,' and condemn themselves.

If he had acted wisely and well, he would even then have gone to his injured and grieved employer, who had been anything but unkind, and have frankly confessed his fault. But Shame and Fear, those twin demons that haunt a guilty conscience, those twin tyrants who act the despot on wrong-doers, prevented him, and all his thoughts were centred on the question, how to secure a safe and speedy flight.

Mother! Home! Brothers! Sisters! Alfred Atheling sat in the little room he had taken in Ned Saltmer's cottage and gave himself up to thoughts of these. The twilight fell; twilight darkened into night; the night wore on; but still

the young man sat, looking with an inner eye at the panorama of Thorpe Aspen and the Garth, listening with an inner ear to the music of voices to which he had been strangely deaf, but which just now were sweeter and mellower than ever, as they smote upon the chords of his memory and reminded him of what had been in the past, and of what might have been in the present:—into the future he dared not look! It was night without and night within, a deep dark night that had never a star to relieve its gloom.

The young prodigal was fairly under the fascination of the home-spell. It worked so strongly that he felt he must go down to Thorpe Aspen at all hazards. He had fully made up his mind to leave England. He felt that here there was no safety, and what was much more to his credit, he felt that there was little chance of his reformation; and with these home influences so strong upon him, these godly spells woven by pious love long before, he did desire to lead a better and a nobler life.

"I must have a look at the dear old homestead, come what will," said he, as he came out of the land of visions and heaved a deep sigh to think it was a dream. "How is it, I wonder, that it comes so strong upon me? I've cared precious little for Thorpe Aspen or aught belonging to it while, while—I've been selling myself to the devil." At this point the young fellow could have joined the sect of the Flagellants with gusto, and have given himself a hiding which would have scarred both skin and memory too. While these cogitations were in progress there came a knock at the door, and in answer to Alfred's loud 'Come in,' Ned Saltmer entered the room.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Ned, lightly touching his forelock, for it was a part of his creed to be very respectful to his lodgers.

"It keeps the bairns right," he used to say, "for they'll

be civil an' respectful if their parents are. Besides, if a lodger pays up, prompt an' full i' honest cash, why shouldn't he be treated like a gentleman? He *is* a gentleman i' that respect whatever else he is; an' it's i' that respect that I've owt to do with him at all. The Duke o' Devonshire couldn't do more than that, an' so long as my lodger does no less, they're both on a level for me."

"Beg pardon, sir," said Ned. "I've knocked two or three times afore. I thowt you was asleep, an' that mebbe that would do you as much good as onything, so I left you alone. But Madge has gotten a bit o' supper ready. Will yo' have it here, or will yo' come into the kitchen? The young 'uns are all gone to bed; an' if you'll join us it'll be more comfortable like. But I'll bring it to you if you prefer it."

"No, thank you, Mr. Saltmer," said Alfred, still only half-way back from Thorpe Aspen and the Past.

"My name's Ned, sir, if you don't mind," said the joiner. "It comes most nat'ral, an' it's so short that it saves pecks o' trouble. My mother used to call me 'Neddy' till I was big enough to notice that owd Sand Hutton, that's an old fellow that used to hawk sand and hearth-stones in a little cart, called his donkey by that name. So I said, 'Mother, say Ned, but nivver say "dee." I don't belong to that family.' She laughed an' remembered, an' it's been Ned ivver since."

"Well, Ned," said Alfred, a little amused, and a little surprised too, for he had some indistinct recollection of a 'Sand Hutton' himself, and 'sand and hearth-stones' smacked strongly of Aspendale, "I prefer to go with you, if Mrs. Saltmer's willing."

"Why, I don't know about Mrs. Saltmer," replied Ned, archly. "She doesn't live our way. But my Madge is willing. Aren't yo', old gell?" for by this time they had reached the kitchen, where Madge was the central figure in a very cheery picture.

"Ah, this is nice," said Alfred with a smile, drawing a chair to the fire. "This is the cosiest corner I've been in since I left Yorkshire."

It is needless to say that this went to the heart of Madge Saltmer. To be told by a Yorkshireman and a gentleman that her fireside surpassed in cosiness any non-Yorkshire specimen of the same sort made her proud indeed. After that, Alfred Atheling may assure himself of staunch and faithful friends, good at need, in honest Ned Saltmer and his cheery wife. Nor was the supper table less worthy of his praise, or he more stinted in its bestowment. The round deal table, with its three straight white legs placed well aslant to give it a firm foot-hold, was covered with a clean white cloth, white as the well-scoured legs of the table that up-bore it. Hereupon was placed a hot beef-steak, done to a turn; a dish of potatoes, that were really cooked, not spoiled, as is too often the case on more imposing boards, and withal, there was such a cheerful warmth about the whole place that Alfred Atheling felt, although he did not say so, that all that he wanted was a good conscience to enable him to sit down and feed like a king. That article, however, he had not got in his possession. It does not come at call, but has to be carefully brought up by hand. He had no appetite, and the supper prepared specially for him was largely disposed off by honest Ned, who alike at his bench and at his trencher was a workman that needed not to be ashamed.



CHAPTER IX.

THE WIDOW ATHELING IS GENTLY TAKEN TO TASK; AND SIMON HOLMES APPEARS AS A SON OF CONSOLATION.

"All are not taken! There are left behind
Living Beloveds, tender looks to bring,
And make the daylight still a happy thing,
And tender voices to make soft the wind."

E. B. Browning.

THE sad tidings concerning Alfred Atheling soon reached the quiet valley of Aspendale. Indeed, the police authorities did not fail to search the neighbourhood with a view to find the trail of the missing youths. The baronet's tall form began to stoop beneath the burden of trouble. He had little to say, but his face was eloquent of grief. The news was diligently kept from the ears of Ethel lying in her quiet chamber, but the whole village of Thorpe Aspen knew of it and mourned.

By the bright log-fire which blazed and crackled in the big, open, old-fashioned hearthstone of Aspen Garth, sat Mrs. Atheling alone with God and her latest sorrow. It is a right noble and beautiful face on which the flame of the beechwood faggots is casting a mellow light. The frosts of sixty winters have whitened the hair, which in her younger days had hung in tresses of gold; but they have failed to

dim the brightness of her eyes, which now as then are of the fairest Saxon blue.

The keen-edged graving tools of sorrow have chased expressive lines upon her cheek and brow; but the calm, attractive dignity and sympathy, blended in form and feature, and still more notable in her general bearing, have gained, not lost, by the threefold influence of piety, experience, and time. As she sits in the spacious ingle nook with the snow-white cap of widowhood above her brow, she is a living and attractive illustration of Time's adorning skill when Religion has made the material ready to its hand.

And yet, just now, her heart is heavy, her cheeks are wet with tears, and like aged David, when a kindred grief oppressed him, she murmurs again and again, as well as she can for the sobs that hinder, "O Alfred, my son, my son!"

As the sorrowing mother was thus communing with her trouble, a stalwart yeoman, clad in farmer's garb, entered the room. His stout nether limbs were encased in leather leggings, and his boots were soaked with the moisture which the evening mist had deposited on the dank autumnal grass. Placing his gun, which he had brought in with him, upon a rack fastened for that purpose to one of the old oak joists overhead, he greeted Mrs. Atheling thus—

"Well, mother mine, a cosy hearthstone isn't an unpleasant vision; the night is both damp and chilly out of doors. I've brought you neither hare nor pheasant, worse luck, but my welcome won't be the less warm for that."

The while he was speaking the new comer had taken the two hands of the widow in his own and imprinted a kiss on either cheek. Then in the tone of one who was resolved on bidding dull care begone, and on hastening its exit too, he continued—

"What, tears again, dear mother! And after all your promises of reformation too! What, then, have you fairly

come to the conclusion that your God and my father's God has resigned His government, and given over the reins of government to a power less loving, less forgiving, less compassionate than He?"

"Oh, no, no, Robert! Don't talk like that, dear. That would be to give up all hope indeed. What should I do? What could I do, if I could not trust in Him?"

"Very well, then, sweet mother. Can my brother Alfred go beyond His reach, or out of His ken? Can he elude the grasp of His strong hand? I'm going to turn the tables on you, and quote your own lessons to your children for your own instruction. You've been in the habit of telling us to avoid the sin of ancient Israel, and not to limit the Holy One of Israel.' Who's doing the limiting now, I wonder? You remember my father's prophecy, his last words as he lay on his deathbed, and my promise to him. I dare not limit the God who inspired him, and both my promise and his prophecy have got to be fulfilled. Cheer up, mother, cheer up!"

"You are right, Robert, as you usually are," said his mother, "but this last lapse of your poor misguided brother seems to shut out all hope. It is the worst as well as the last. His descent, I fear, will now be more rapid, until recovery becomes impossible."

"Nay, nay, mother. Impossible is a word we must never use when the power and grace of God come into question. His mother and his brother, as well as others who love him, have power where it is most required; and the prayers of his father, now gone to his reward, are registered on high."

Under such wise and tender treatment the mournful mother partially dried her tears, and nursed the hope of the wanderer's recovery, and his return to the hearthstone from which he had wandered so fast and so far. Then came Clara and Edgar, both of them well pleased to note

that once again their mother's grief was lifted, and that Hope, that fair angel sent by God to sustain His children in their extremity of need, had resumed its place in her sorely troubled heart.

"Well done, Robert," said Clara. "I see you've been applying your old prescription; and once again the patient rallies beneath your skilful treatment." So saying, she placed her arms around his neck and kissed him with a fervour in which love and gratitude were combined.

"Yes, Clara," said he with a gratified look. "I hope you won't fail to bring the same prescription to bear should there be any serious recurrence after I am gone. I've been planning matters to-day with Edgar. He will now take my place upon the farm. He is thoroughly well able to manage it, and there is no great pressure of responsibility at this season of the year. Things will go on pretty much of themselves, and under his guiding hand will go right. I can be spared now better than after, and I mean to take a trip to London. If brother Alfred can be found, I'll find him. If he can be induced to come back, I'll bring him. The time has come for me to fulfil my promise, the promise that soothed my father's dying pillow."

"Go, my son," said the widow, laying her hand lovingly on his shoulder, and trying her best to catch and hold fast the hope kindled by his words and tone. "May God bring you back in peace, and if my poor wandering lad comes too, I will say like Simeon, Now, Lord, lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

"Don't say 'if,' mother," said Edgar stoutly. "Robert doesn't go on his mission at his own charges, and we who stay at home will not hinder him even by a doubt."

By-and-by the conversation turned on the necessary preparations for Robert's speedy departure, and as the evening hours passed by, the family at Aspen Garth seemed one and

all to be able to regard the impending change with cheerfulness, though, ever and anon, the olden cloud would gather for a little on the mother's placid brow.

Just as the tall, old-fashioned clock, which stood upright in the corner of the room, was striking, and the flicker of the beech logs showed the hour hand on the figure nine, a rap was heard at the door, and one of the servants announced that Simon Holmes had called, and that, if convenient, he would like to see Mrs. Atheling.

"Convenient?" said the widow, brightening at the mention of his name, "to be sure it is. Tell him to come in." Then turning to her children, she continued, "It would be hard to find a time that wasn't convenient to receive such a welcome guest."

"Good evenin', ma'am," said Simon, as he entered the room with a courteous bow, "I hev' to apologise for comin' at an' awk'ard hoor. But I didn't seem as though I could sleep i' comfort, or wi' ony degree o' soondness, unless I'd gi'en yo' just a neighbourly call."

"Nay, nay, Simon," said Robert Atheling, stepping forward to hand him a chair. "Mother's glad and fain to see you, and for that matter, so are we all."

"Draw your chair to the fire, Simon," said the widow. "The night is rather chill, I think, and you and I are not so young as we once were."

"Now I call that treason," said Clara, shaking her curls, and looking first at her mother and then at their visitor with a merry smile. "The fact is that you've both of you made some compact with the wee folks in Fairyland, and have got a supply of the fern seed which makes old age invisible. *I* can't see that either of you have any need to talk in that way. Young folks like us *do* grow older: middle-aged folks like you seem to stand still, and the longer you two do that the better, say I."

"Ha, ha," laughed Simon. "Invisible, is it? As far as it

consarns myself, it isn't unfeelable, if I may mak' a wod for my own convenience. As for your mother," continued Simon, gallantly, "there's no denyin' it, she looks—"

"Stop, Simon," said the widow. "No flattery from your lips, old friend. One's bairns may try to dupe themselves about us a little for love's sake, but we know better. Old age is creeping on."

"Ay, marry, you're right anuff," replied Simon. "But then, thenk God, there's another way o' puttin' it,—an' a better way, because i' your case an' mahne it's true. Old age is creepin' off. The inward man's bein' renewed day by day, an' the ootward man's crackin' and lowsnin' like a husk; an' when it shells off some o' these days, old age 'll be gone, and then it'll nivver, nivver come back ony mair. Then we

> 'Shall flourish in endurin' bloom,
> Safe from diseases an' decline.'

That's the way to look at old age from a Christian's standpoint. There's both reason an' religion in it for iverybody that beleeaves in Him that says, 'He that liveth an' beleeaveth in Me shall nivver die.'"

"You are right, Simon," said Widow Atheling seriously, yet brightly. "That was seen clear enough when my dear husband exchanged mortality for life. It seemed to us who watched him pass, that the tokens of the weight of years died away before he passed, and that immortal youth was on him as he went away."

"I'm going to leave Aspendale for awhile," said Robert, taking advantage of the pause that followed. "I should like Simon to join us at the family altar and ask God's blessing on my errand. You know what it is, Simon?"

"Ay, laddie, I knoa," said the carpenter, with strong feeling, and taking Robert's hand in his own rugged palm. "Mr. Edgar gav' me a notion that you were on the point

o' startin.' I ha' nof ear o' you, knowin' what I knoa', both o' your promise an' the way you'll set aboot it. It was mainly that that browt me here so late. My mind kept runnin' on it, an' as I thowt o' your mother biddin' yo' good-bye, an' fearin', mebbe, my poetisin' wakeness com' ower me, an', an' I couldn't help puttin' my thowts on paper. At times like them it seems to me as tho' I can allus speeak my heart best i' that way."

"O Simon!" said Clara, "I know. You have been makin' some verses to cheer and comfort mother when Robert's gone. Do let us hear them."

The eyes of the sensitive maiden glistened with tears of delight, for Simon's verses were at a premium right through the valley of Aspendale.

"Mebbe Mr. Robert will read 'em," said the carpenter, with an ingenuous blush on his cheek. "They are what I knoa' he's sayin' to his mother in his heart."

Nothing loth, Robert did as he was requested, and as the sentiment was really an echo of the language of his own soul, he did full justice to the carpenter's sympathetic song.

"Mother, dear mother mine, why dost thou weep,
Sitting in silence and grieving alone?
Is then thy Helper afar or asleep?
Or sitteth He, ruleth He still on His throne?

Mournest thou, weepest thou still for thy boy,
Gone from thee, far from thee; gone from his God?
God can still turn all thy sorrow to joy,
Turn the lad's heart to thee, show him the road.

None are so bad but they might have been worse,
None fall so low that they cannot be raised;
The cry 'God be pitiful' ever shall force
From the heart the glad chorus of 'God shall be praised.'

Wearily wandering out on the wold,
Bleateth the sheep its complaint to the wind;

Will not the shepherd bring back to the fold
The lost with a love that is tender and kind?

Beautiful blossoms of sheeniest gold
Will cover the keen prickled bushes of gorse;
The flower, like a gem, flashes out of the mould,
And blessings may blossom e'en out of a curse.

Winter must vanish when springtide returns;
Tempests must cease when their forces are done;
And the dew shall replenish with nectar the urns
Of the flowers that droop in the heat of the sun.

Tears are the certain forerunner of smiles;
Sighs are the swift-winged heralds of song;
And the griefs of to-day Angel Hope still beguiles,
With the joy that to-morrow is bringing along.

Far hath the prodigal wandered away,
Wantoning, revelling, scorching his wing:
Home shall he come on some penitent day,
Welcomed with rapture, robe, banquet and ring.

Mother mine, mother mine! mercy still reigns:
Thy God hath the soul of thy boy in His care;
A turning will come in the longest of lanes—
Hope in God! Trust in Him. Never despair."

"Oh how very beautiful!" said Mrs Atheling, constrained to smile through her tears. "Thank you, dear friend. I am sure they will be of lasting help and comfort to me whenever my fears begin to get the better of my faith. I do thank you, Simon, from my heart."

"Mother," said Robert, "you shall give me your promise, that whenever you feel inclined to hang your harp upon the willows, and sit down by the rivers of Memory and weep, you shall tune it afresh and sing Simon's music till the day dawn and the shadows flee away. I shall write a copy for myself, and find a 'cheer-up' in them whenever my faith begins to fail."

There was no wonder that, as the old carpenter conducted family worship, the whole household felt that the place was holy ground. There was no wonder that Simon Holmes retired to his cottage, as he had retired many a time before in the course of his beneficent life, followed by the thanks and blessings of them from whose pathway he had plucked the thorns and had planted sweet flowers in their stead. Hie thee home, old man, and know, as thou layest thy head upon the pillow, that the All-observant Master hath said of thee, "Well done!"



CHAPTER X.

SIR JARVIS MAINWARING DREAMS A DREAM; AND ETHEL SPOFFORTH SPEAKS IN AN UNKNOWN TONGUE.

"If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,
My dreams presage some joyful news at hand;
My bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne;
And all this day, an unaccustomed spirit
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts."

Shakespeare.

SIR JARVIS MAINWARING, whose arrival at Aspen Towers has already been noted, was one of the most eminent of the many eminent professors of the healing art either in England or the world out of doors. He held high office in relation to royalty, and, altogether, in fame and influence Sir Jarvis was probably the first physician of his day.

On two previous occasions he had visited Ethel Spofforth at heavy cost and charges, and had bestowed great attention on her case. If he had been a much sterner individual than he was, he could scarcely have helped feeling and manifesting strong interest in the young and beautiful and for ever uncomplaining sufferer at Aspen Towers. With all his great skill, however, neither his prescriptions nor his counsels had done more than alleviate the more painful features of Ethel's mysterious disease, and to add to her

comfort in other ways. This, however, was a precious gain, and quite compensated, according to the baronet's thinking, for Sir Jarvis Mainwaring's princely fee. But the root of the disease baffled all the doctor's wit to pluck out or even to find.

"Good morning, Sir Godwin," said the physician, who was warmly welcomed by the baronet as he entered the Hall. "I bring bright weather with me, at any rate: let us hope that is a good omen. How is the young lady this morning?"

"Much the same, I imagine, Sir Jarvis. At least," continued the baronet with a faint and forced smile, "that is the state of things according to the law of averages. *I* think she is worse;—weaker, you know, and less able to bear the strain than when you saw her last. But Ethel declares that she is better; and so I conclude that she is much about as usual."

"Nay, nay, Sir Godwin," said the physician cheerily, "your conclusion is not warranted by your premises. The opinions quoted are not of equal value. Miss Ethel is surely in a position to know better than you: and among all my patients I know of none less likely to deceive themselves. So I conclude that time, patience, and good nursing, with youth as a powerful ally, are doing what medical science seems unable to perform. I am candid, you see."

Sir Jarvis proceeded to take some refreshment. He had travelled from, London by the night mail, and was prepared to do justice to his first substantial meal for the day.

"By the way, Sir Godwin," said he, as soon as he began to be less interested in the good things set before him, "I have something very remarkable to tell you: something that I consider to be very remarkable indeed.

"Just before I started for the north, by a stroke of good luck this week's number of the *Lancet* came into my hand: and I was able by the aid of my reading lamp—the lighting of

railway carriages is atrocious—to make my journey less tedious by dipping into its pages. Well, I read for a time, then dropped off into a brief nap; then I woke up and read again. Then after, as I imagined, I had exhausted every page, advertisement columns into the bargain, I threw it carelessly aside, and settled myself for a good two hours' sleep, by which time as I reckoned the train would pull up at Chilworth station.

"My long nap was by no means a steady one. I was in that semi-wakeful condition that stupefies more than it refreshes, when I was suddenly roused by the porter's cry, 'Chilworth! Chilworth!' I felt so thoroughly unhinged that I determined to go into the waiting-room and get half an hour's refreshing sleep. The porter brought me my travelling rug, and by-and-by I managed to get fairly off into the Land of Nod.

"Straightway, as it seemed to me, I began to dream, in which, after passing through a few confused experiences, I found myself in the house of a dear old chum of mine, who was a fellow-student at Guy's Hospital. He has devoted himself of late years to the study of electricity, especially in its action on the human body. He was very fond of this kind of thing in our student days. We looked on it only as a 'fad' of his own, and used to chaff him a good deal, student fashion.

"Well, in my dream, I seemed to become aware that he had at last perfected a new medical apparatus which was supposed to supply a means of generating nerve force, or rather of stimulating the nerve centres, so that on the one hand these should be made to perform their office, and yet, on the other hand, should not subject the nerves of a weak patient to an unnatural and dangerous strain.

"Nothing would satisfy Dr. Greaves, so my dream ran, but that I must try the effect of a sharp shock upon myself. I suppose I have the hideous shaking of the train to thank

for that, for as soon as I laid hold of the instrument. I received a shock that thoroughly woke me up. I started to my feet, and distinctly heard myself say:

"'That's the very thing, old friend. It will be of great use in special cases.'

"Your carriage had arrived, and as soon as I was 'on board,' as the sailors say, I noticed that the careful porter had rolled up the discarded *Lancet*, and had thrust it under the leather strap that bound my portmanteau. Rather an uncommon specimen that of the genus porter, thought I, remembering how ready his kind are to appropriate all such articles as perquisites of their own.

"I took out the journal again, and, would you believe it? the first paragraph that caught my eye was headed, 'Dr. Feltham Greaves on Electro-Dynamics in relation to Surgery.' I suppose I must have glanced my eye over it when I was half asleep, and by some occult process of unconscious cerebration, it had made its impression on my brain, and had produced the dream which I have just described to you.

"Of course I read the article now with fresh interest, and just as the carriage brought me within distant view of Aspen Towers, the thought suddenly flashed upon my mind, 'Miss Spofforth! the very thing!' Without an instant's pause, I bade the coachman drive back to the railway station. I sent off a peremptory message to my friend Greaves, and if the thing be within the limits of possibility, he and his apparatus will be down by this evening's mail. I feel so deeply interested in the matter, for the sake of this dear girl, and for the sake of medical science, too, that if you can give me a 'shake-down,' I'll stop and see the issue.

"Now, Sir Godwin, was it not truly remarkable? I call it very singular, very singular indeed. I positively do not know that I have met with anything more strange in the whole of my experience. What say you, Sir Godwin?"

"It is indeed very singular," replied the baronet, slowly and thoughtfully. There was a far-away look in his grey eyes, for they were fixed upon a scene which took place in the street of a Jewish city more than eighteen hundred years ago, when Jesus, looking into the sad face of an anxious father, said, 'Be not afraid, only believe.'

Yes, Sir Jarvis Mainwaring, it is as you say, very singular, very singular indeed. But I humbly and modestly submit to you, and through you to all the learned faculty connected with your noble science, that neither 'unconscious cerebration' nor 'molecular movements,' nor all the phosphoric agencies secreted in the cranium can at all account for it. But if you will stoop a little; if you will step down from your high scientific pedestal, and will consult Simon Holmes, the village carpenter, I think he will be able to explain it and give you clear testimony as to the reason why, and that without claiming any miraculous intervention in the case. I am afraid you will not be inclined to accept so humble and unlearned a witness as he; I will therefore refer you to that other Carpenter, who said, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,' and who also said, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.' If you reject this witness, then it will for ever remain, as you say, 'singular, very singular indeed.'

Sir Jarvis Mainwaring proceeded to visit his young and interesting patient. He was agreeably surprised to find her wearing a bright and cheerful look, and with ever so faint a tinge of colour in her cheeks.

"Well, Miss Ethel," said he cheerfully, as he seated himself by her bed, "I declare you look brighter and better than when I saw you last; and I remember that even then you were brighter than I should have thought you could be, poor little pent-up prisoner that you are."

"Why, you see, Sir Jarvis," replied Ethel, "I get my

cheerfulness from a source which is independent of circumstances, and being a prisoner only serves to keep it steadier and to make it more."

"Well," said the physician, "I am willing to own that, whatever it is, it puts our skill into the shade, Miss Ethel. I cannot understand it."

"I suppose you wouldn't bend low enough to listen to a poor weak girl, or I might try to make you understand," said she. "You remember what another prisoner sang once—

"'Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
A holy mind and innocent
Calls that a hermitage.
If I have freedom in my soul,
And if my heart be free,
Angels alone that dwell above
Enjoy such liberty.'

It is in my soul and in my heart that this liberty comforts me, for Jesus Christ hath revealed His truth and love to me, and He says, 'If the truth shall make you free, then shall ye be free indeed.'"

"Well, well," said Sir Jarvis, evidently conscious that she was getting out of his depth, and he might well have thought, above his height, too,—"I envy your philosophy. It is not every bird that can sing in a cage. However, I do hope and believe we shall open your prison doors; so keep a good heart."

"Thank you, Sir Jarvis," said the maiden, "but I don't like you to call it philosophy. Call it the love of Jesus, please. *His* cage-birds can always sing, and sing their sweetest behind the wires. I believe that I shall get well again. Indeed, I may say that I know it."

"Oh, you know it, do you? Well, that I imagine is half

the battle. Faith helps the doctor wonderfully. But what makes you feel so sure?"

"The promise of my God," said Ethel, firmly and steadily:

> "'His every word of grace is strong
> As that which built the skies;
> The voice that rolls the stars along
> Speaks all the promises.'

Do you know, Sir Jarvis, I believe that my God has given me a mission to perform; and when the set time comes, *His* time, you know, He who sends me to do it will give me power to go."

The great physician listened, wondered, felt half taken captive by her 'full assurance.' He was bound to say something.

"Well, Miss Ethel, I sincerely hope that you will soon recover. I really am not without faith that you will. I am going to try another method of cure, and if——"

"Don't trouble about the 'if,' Sir Jarvis," said she with a smile. "I can quite believe that my Heavenly Father has suggested to you what is the best thing to do. Only I wish you would give Him credit for it, and perhaps in your heart you do."

Again Sir Jarvis thought of his strange dream, and retired from her presence, saying to himself, "It is very singular, very singular indeed."

Yes, Sir Jarvis Mainwaring, it certainly is singular. I do not wonder at your surprise. Again I would recommend you to seek an explanation from Simon Holmes, the carpenter of Thorpe Aspen, he is an excellent authority; or better still from Him of Nazareth, the Revealer of secrets. Happy and wise are they who sit at His feet and respond to His invitation,—'Learn of Me.'

Of course all this became the subject of conversation

between Sir Godwin and his guest. As they sat beside the library fire after dinner, whither they had adjourned for cosier quarters, and were discussing a magnum of port, Sir Jarvis could not but refer to his conversation with the young invalid.

"What an extraordinary notion Miss Ethel has got hold of," said he. "Of course I could not possibly see things from her standpoint; but for the life of me, I could not but listen. There is such a transparent simplicity and genuine truth in the dear girl that it quite disarms one. I would not have disputed her position for the world."

"What are you referring to?" said the baronet. Not that he did not know, but that he desired to draw out the physician's ideas about it.

"I refer to her simple faith in God," said Sir Jarvis. "The notion that she has received some inward gift that makes her happy; that she is a kind of ward of Divine Providence, who shapes and directs affairs in a way that especially concerns her. I have heard of people who profess to believe in that kind of thing, and I have not hesitated to set it down as mere superstition, where, indeed, it is not downright hypocrisy. But I have never seen such a development of it as in Miss Ethel. She is too good and real to deceive herself or other people: and I should say that superstition does not meet the case here, because of her native good sense, and the clearness and readiness with which she renders a reason for the hope that is in her. It is very strange and very interesting."

Sir Godwin was silent for a moment or two and then replied with a sigh—

"I am often very much inclined to think that she has happened on the sunlight, and that we, excuse me for saying so, are living in the shadow."

He was thinking just then of the Voice that said '*Talitha cumi*' long ago.

"Where do you think she picked up these ideas?" said Sir Jarvis, apparently disregarding the baronet's suggestion.

"From her mother, first of all," was the reply. "Of her, I am bound to say, that life and faith were in beautiful agreement. From her nurse and waiting maid, in the second place; and of her I am equally bound to say that she is sterling gold, faithful, high principled, invaluable. From an old carpenter in the village called Simon Holmes, in the third place, and perhaps the chief place; and of him I am bound to say that he is a good man, estimable in all the relations of life; a plain working-man of great intelligence, unquestionable integrity, and honoured by all who know him; half worshipped, indeed, in Thorpe Aspen, where he is known the best. All this you must own is striking witness, and I must not leave out my darling herself. When I am with her she makes me feel, quite unconsciously to herself, that I am in the presence of something higher, nobler than I. I wish you could have a little chat with Simon Holmes. You would find in him what Diogenes, they say, could not find, even with the aid of his lantern, a *man*, and also a scholar learned in a lore that I fail to understand. He told me the other day," continued the baronet, with a smile, "that he regarded you as the instrument, tool, he called it, of Divine Providence, and that he believed that before you went away it would so appear."

The physician looked at his host with some surprise, and then his gaze fell upon the library table. There lay the *Lancet*, and he thought of the 'unconscious cerebration' that had produced his dream. Was he indeed the tool of a Power whom he did not acknowledge, made to do the bidding of a God whom he did not know?

CHAPTER XI.

DOCTOR FELTHAM GREAVES GAINS AN IMPORTANT VICTORY; AND SIMON HOLMES ANSWERS A FEW POINTED QUESTIONS.

"A voice is in the wind I do not know;
A meaning on the face of the high hills
Whose utterance I cannot comprehend,
A something is behind them; that is God."

George Macdonald.

IN due time Doctor Feltham Greaves appeared upon the scene, bringing with him the appliances which, as he firmly believed, were destined, when controlled by skilful hands and under wise medical direction, to be a powerful ally in expelling disease and in bringing back to the flow the ebbing tide of strength and life.

All honour to the men whose noble powers of mind and whose high attainments are engaged in the nobler work of alleviating human suffering, and of redeeming the sick and afflicted ones from the cruel grip of dire disease and the peril of an untimely death. If they would but place themselves under the guidance, and labour as the staunch and faithful allies and servants, of the Good Physician, how vastly grander, even than now, would their glorious triumphs be!

Once, twice, thrice was Ethel subjected to the gentle but

subtle and potent forces now brought to bear on her mysterious disease. It did not seem as though any sure results would follow. But Dr. Greaves was an enthusiast. He had perfect faith in the course of treatment he was pursuing; and he added to his faith patience, and let patience have her perfect work. Then there came a favourable sign or two, slight but real. Then, little by little, it was seen that the stern grip of paralysis was relaxing, and tokens of returning vital force appeared that could not be misunderstood.

It was slow and tedious work at first; but the tedium was wonderfully lessened by the constant advancement to assured success. Fingers could be moved; then the hands obeyed the action of the wrist. Then the arms could be raised; and then the lower limbs began to act responsive to their owner's call. The icy bonds were slowly melting, and medical skill and wise dietings aided in the task. Of course Sir Jarvis Mainwaring could not stay to watch the process of cure: but assured of its fair promise, he rose early one morning and retired from the scene with his well-earned cheque in his pocket-book, and, sooth to say, a warm glad feeling at his heart, to travel back to town, and to tell in scientific, and it may be into royal ears, the story of his very singular dream and all that it was likely to produce.

As the carriage which bore him to Chilworth station passed the front gate of Simon Holmes' garden, that good man and true was standing there, and he ventured to ask the coachman the question that was next his heart.

"How is Miss Ethel this morning?"

"Better, Simon!" curtly replied coachman Smailes in jubilant tones.

Sir Jarvis was struck with the eager way in which the question was asked. He was much taken with the fine intelligent countenance of the village carpenter of whom Sir Goodwin had spoken with such unstinting praise. He

called upon the coachman to stop. Simon was dressed, not in his ordinary work-a-day attire, but in his Sunday suit of decent black, and with his stout oaken stick in his hand was evidently going on a journey. As Sir Jarvis put his head out of the carriage, Simon lifted his broad-brimmed hat, for there was something quakerly in his attire. His impressive features, especially his lofty brow and long grey hair, gave him quite a patriarchal look.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Simon respectfully, expecting a rebuke for addressing the coachman at such a time. "There isn't a soul i' Aspendale that won't eat their breakfast better for hearing good news about the young lady; an' as I'm goin' through the dale to Chilworth, I thowt I would like to tell 'em as I went, let alone that such news as that would be better than brek'ast or dinner to myself."

"To Chilworth, are you, carpenter?" said Sir Jarvis pleasantly. "Then jump in and let me act the good Samaritan for once. You can tell the news when you come back, and it will sharpen the good folks' appetite for dinner or for tea."

Like a sensible fellow as he was, Simon did as he was told, and took his seat opposite, as if to the manner born. I am half inclined to think that Sir Jarvis was more willing than he would have cared to own, to know more of Miss Ethel's peculiar 'philosophy,' and as Simon was the Gamaliel at whose feet she sat, he seized the opportunity to study it a little further.

"I'm glad to be able to give you a lift," said he. "It's a stiffish walk to Chilworth for a man of your years."

"I's varry much obliged to yo', sir. I can't manage it quite so briskly as I use to; but I expect I should ha' been picked up, either by the miller's cart, or by some farmer's waggon goin' to 'liver corn at Chilworth station. I sartainly didn't expect to do the journey i' this style;" and Simon surveyed the luxurious appointments of the baronet's

brougham with an admiring eye. Then turning at once to more important matters, he continued—

"Excuse me, sir, for makin' so free, but aboot Miss Ethel; she's goin' to get better, isn't she?"

"That's a statement and a question," said Sir Jarvis, with a smile. "The question I can understand; but what makes you say 'she's going to get better'?"

"Why, I'll tell yo', sir. Me an' my 'Becca, that's my wife, and Nance, that's my dowter, an' Miss Ethel herself, hev' all been at work askin' Him that says 'Ask, an' it shall be given you,' to give her back her health, both for her sake an' her father's sake, but mair especially for her brother's sake, that she may bring him back again. But mebbe—"

Here the carpenter paused. He had a strong objection to anything like the exposure of other people's misdoings, and he was not sure how much his listener really knew.

"Oh yes, I know," said Sir Jarvis, fully appreciating his motives. "If you could save that young prodigal it would be a grand thing."

"Wouldn't it?" said Simon, bringing his broad hand down upon his knee with a slap that startled the dignified medico half off his seat. "My word! It would mak' ivery angel i' heaven shoot a extra halleluia! An' Miss Ethel's goin' to do it, thenks to you, sir, an' the good God that's showed yo' hoo to raise her up!"

The Lord that showed you how. Sir Jarvis was fairly startled at the thought. He could not get away from it; his singular dream, and all that it had led to, came back into his mind. Was he really an instrument in the hands of God for the work of answering these people's prayers? Anxious to draw out his companion on these subjects he inquired—

"Don't you think that it is very strange and mysterious that this dear young lady, who is too good to do harm to any-

body, should have been made to suffer so much and so long?"

"Yis, sir," said Simon. "There's no doot aboot that. But it didn't come by chance. That's where faith i' God comes in. Sorrowful days an' wearisome neets were appointed to her, a great monny on 'em, bless her! But then you see, sir, they *were* appointed. They were all the pairt of a plan. What the entire plan was we can't tell, though we're gettin' a bit of a inklin' aboot sum on it. As for the rest we just ha' to leeave it, as we ha' to leeave a good monny things i' this wo'ld besides. There isn't a lad that goes to school that doesn't wonder what for he's to get off this or larn that. But the schoolmaister knoas, an' he just goes on teachin' him as though he understood all aboot it. An' what are we all, I should like to knoa, but just lads at a school? It's gi'en to you an' sitch as you to be i' t' fost class, and mebbe you stand at t' top on't, but there's a mighty gap, excuse me, sir, between you an' t' Schoolmaister after all, an' you're soon browt up plump ageean a mystery.

"I recollect," continued the carpenter, "goin' some years back to see a ribbin factory i' company with a clever fello' with a lot of gumption aboot machinery an' sitch as that. There was one piece o' clockwork or something like it that interested him amazin'ly. There was a lot o' wheels an' threads spinnin' aboot i' all directions, an' for the life of 'im he couldn't understand it. 'I should like to see into that an' examine it a little bit,' he said to the foreman. 'You can't do that,' the man said, 'it's all connected with something i' that big chest that's kept locked.' 'Let me look in' says my friend. Says the man, at once, 'The maister hez the key.' That settled it. Noo, sir, it flashed upo' my mind like leetnin' that's just the answer to all oor questions aboot a mystery that perplexes us, The Maister hez the key. You see t' ribbins was all right an' beautiful, though the chest was

shut an' we couldn't understand it. An' so God's works an' workin's are all right, all of 'em, though we can't mak' 'em oot. It's grand to think that they aren't at the beck an' call o' poor blunderin' mortals. All's right, sir, all must be right, don't yo' see, because t' Maister hez the key."

"Then you really believe," said the physician, who felt that he must content himself with making inquiries, "that God has full control, and exercises it over all the events of every individual life, and influences you and me to serve His purposes?"

"Believe it?" said Simon with a look of unfeigned wonder, "of course I believe it, an' so do you, don't yo'? I shouldn't ha' gi'en you credit or rayther discredit o' thinkin' 'at we're all of us livin' happy-go-lucky like, wi' no more plan nor purpose then flints hev when they're skelled up oot of a farmer's cart. You don't suppose, do yo', that you could ha' done Miss Ethel sitch a good turn this visit if He hadn't put yo' up to tryin' a new thing that you scarce heeard aboot until yo' com' to the varry spot w'ere it was wanted? My 'prentice lad Dick's just gone to put a cooat o' paint on Sir Godwin's park gates. Noo, do you think that t' lad fancies that pot o' paint's jummled itself togither to the right colour? He hadn't knowledge anuff to do it hisself, so I did it afore I sent him off. He was busy aboot something else until he had to go, an' when he was riddy, it was riddy, an' he's just usin' what was provided for him. An' that's what you an' t'other London doctor's doin' at the Hall this minute. Efter all, sir, we're none of us no better than 'prentice lads. Oor business is to be good lads, an' to do as t' Maister tells us. Excuse me for being so bold."

"Oh, don't mention it," said Sir Jasper; "I am very glad to hear your views upon these subjects. But you must admit that they have puzzled wiser heads than either yours or mine."

"No doot, no doot. These things is offen hid from the

wise an' prudent, an' at same tahme they're revealed unto babes. There's Miss Ethel, for instance, she knows that the cup she hez to drink is of her Heavenly Father's mixin'. I think you'll admit that she drinks it with a submission, an' a patience, an' a contentment, that's beautiful to see. You've been among 'em a good deal; ha' yo' iver seen ony o' the wise heads that's made less of a wry face than she hez? It's nobbut a bee that can suck honey oot of a thistle-floo'er, an' that's the little quick-wing that hez t' sweetest store o' good things when winter storms blow keen. After all, I can't help thinkin' that Miss Ethel's is the wiser head, an' she believes in a Father's care, God bless her! Long may she do so. We can't do better, sir, than follow the 'babe's' example."

"You were saying," said Sir Jarvis, who felt that matters were getting serious and that the atmosphere of the carriage was rather hot, "that you've been praying for Miss Spofforth's recovery. Tell me, now—you seem to be a sensible and intelligent man—do you really believe that the natural course of things can be altered by doing that kind of thing? Can you for one moment imagine that the laws of nature are to be interfered with in that fashion?"

"The laws o' natur'!" said Simon, fixing his grey eyes on the physician's face with a mixture of rebuke and wonder on his features. "If they are 'laws,' I suppose Somebody must ha' laid 'em doon. You can't ha' laws withoot a law-maker. An' if He can mak' sitch things as them, it surely isn't ower mitch to imagine that He can guide an' control 'em. You don't suppose that He's meeade an engine that runs away with Him or fre' Him, an' that He can't stop, or slacken, or turn it if He's so minded. Don't contradict yourself. An' as for t' natural coorse o' things, as yo' call it, if things do go in a 'coorse,' why somebody must ha' chalked it oot for 'em an' started 'em off; a somebody that keeps 'em in it an' at it all the tahme. A man that

can say when he sees all the motions o' natur', an' sees hoo they all fit one into another like spooakes in a wheel, an axle in a naff, an' a ball in a socket, 'at there's no God's a fool, as David said afore you an' me were born. You might just as well draw them front blinds doon, an' lean back i' your seat an' listen to the noise o' the wheels, an' watch the coorse o' the carriage an' say, 'There isn't a driver, nobbut a hoss!' Noo, if you just call oot to Smailes there who set us off on this natural coorse o' things that you call a rooad, he can slacken, or turn, or quicken pretty much as he likes, an' even whip t'cooach roound an' tak' yo' back again. If you profess to beleeave that the Somebody who drives things along the ordinary coorse o' natur' hez less poo'er accordin'*ly* than Smailes the cooachman, or hez less care and kindness for them He carries, I must just tak' the liberty o' sayin' I don't beleeave yo'—there! An' you may set me doon on the highway if you like for bein' so plain spokken. I don't want to seeam ungrateful, but you shouldn't say what yo' don't mean."

Sir Jarvis Mainwaring, M.D., F.R.S., &c., &c., really had not the courage to say that he did mean it. He did not care to face another rebuke from the man whose faith in God was so well based. He preferred to remain under the imputation of double-dealing, and was not sorry, perhaps, when their arrival at Chilworth station put an end to the situation. The physician took the next train to town, thinking of the Somebody who guides the course of things; the Charioteer who with unseen bit and bridle had driven him through his singular dream; and had then put him into double harness with Doctor Feltham Greaves to draw Ethel Spofforth along the ordinary course of things towards health and strength, and towards the fulfilment of the sacred mission committed to her charge.

CHAPTER XII.

JACOB BENSON THE GAMEKEEPER PURSUES A POACHER; AND TIM CROUCH GIVES A SPECIMEN OF LAPSTONE LOGIC.

"*Flav.* Thou art a cobbler, art thou?
2nd Cit. Truly, sir, all that I live by is the awl.
I am indeed a surgeon to old shoes."
Shakespeare.

IN a small cottage not far from the gates of Aspen Chase dwelt an odd character known throughout Aspendale as Tim the Cobbler. The cottage itself was built so that the gable end abutted on the main road which ran through the centre of the village. On the lower floor was a large window extending almost from side to side of the cottage. In this were placed a number of boot-laces, heel and toe plates of various sizes, strips of leather, and other matters connected with Tim's lawful calling, together with a few boots, shoes and slippers, more or less the worse for wear, and which had been brought by the villagers for restoration and repairs.

A long, broad window shutter was suspended by hinges from the outer sill. It was not allowed, however, to fall into a perpendicular position against the wall, for Tim's wife, being, like John Gilpin's, of a thrifty turn of mind, had got her spouse to supply it with a couple of legs also fastened by

hinges. By the aid of these the broad shutter, fixed in a horizontal position, did duty as a table or stall, on which were spread sundry small articles for sale. These were of a very miscellaneous character, and included nuts, fruits, flowers, vegetables, bottles of lemonade and gingerbeer, and an assortment of sweetmeats. Among the rest were scattered such small matters connected with her husband's time-honoured craft, as shoe-strings, buttons, buckles and what not. Sally Crouch was not at all particular as to her stock-in-trade so long as she could 'turn an honest penny,' to quote a favourite phrase of her own.

"Poor fooaks," she used to say, "mun live, an' Tim an' his lapstun' can't allus manage to keep the wolf from the dooar."

Tim Crouch, like most other of the sons of Crispin, was a great politician. Though he had not the 'gift of tongues' he certainly had a gift of tongue, and he put that to such constant use, that the very thought of his ever having any more was not to be thought of without positive alarm.

Only let him get fairly on his hobby and he would ring the changes on 'Bobby Peel,' 'Old Pam,' 'Disrayly,' and 'Gladdy,' also on the Corn Laws and 'Dick Cobden,' on the Franchise and 'Jacky Russell,' and there was evidently no reason why, like Tennyson's brook, his 'chatter, chatter, chatter,' should not 'go on for ever.' Tim's shop was a sort of rendezvous for such of the villagers as had any spare time on their hands: and when Jacob Benson the game-keeper, Peter Prout the miller, who usually 'sat on the cross benches,' and Sam Vause, the blacksmith, whose politics were always strongest on the side on which 'the chance of beer did most preponderate,' got together for argument, the cobbler's shop became a perfect pandemonium. It must be said, however, that owing to his eloquent 'gift of the gab,' Tim generally came off triumphant. On those rare occasions when he was fairly driven into a corner, so

that his tongue could no further avail him, he used to seize his lapstone, place a thick piece of leather on it, and hammer away at such a rate that his antagonists were literally beaten out of the field. The defeated trio would retire in a huff, and then the victor would drop his hammer, rub his stubbly black hair, which could scarcely have been cropped any closer, and say with a contemptuous smile of superiority—

"Tim Crouch is more than a match for all on 'em put tegither."

Hither to the cobbler's shop, one raw and misty winter-night, came Jacob Benson.

"Hollo!" said Tim, as the gamekeeper stepped inside, "ah thowt 'at yo' weren't cummin' ageean, 'keeper." It must be explained that on the very last occasion of Jacob's visit the lapstone logic had prevailed, and Jacob had retired in a passion, declaring that he would never come within earshot of the 'thumping wind-bag' any more.

"Sit yo' doon," continued Tim. "What's the news?"

"News!" said Jacob, in serious tones. "I've news that'll mak' your hair stand on end. Leastwise it would do if it was long anuff to lay doon."

So saying the gamekeeper placed a small cutting-board across a pail that stood near the stove, in which certain balls of wax were floating to keep them moist for use, and sat down.

"I declare I've had quite a turn," he continued. "You know that stiff bit o' coppice just behind Aspen Garth, at the corner o' the larch plantation? Well, I've been watchin' that spot a good while. There's been a good deal o' poachin' goin' on there lately. Last night I saw Nick Ste'enson, Chivey, you kno, at least I could ha' sworn it was him, creep into the coppice, an' mak' for the wood side. Whether he got scent o' me or not, I can't say. I missed him an' went home in a bit of a temper."

"A big bit, I expect if t' truth was known, size of a lump o' chalk," put in Tim with a laugh.



"Just as I stooped to seize him, he looks me straight i' the face, an' says, 'Benson, for God's sake, let me go.'"—*Page* 93.

"We ain't gotten a worse poacher i' this neighbourhood than he is," persisted Jacob. "Says I to myself, I'll nab yo' next tahme, my man, as sure as a gun. So to-night I went an hid myself in a thorn bush just by the hedge between t' coppice an' t' paddock. Well, I waited aboot an hour or so, an' began to think o' failure. Then I hears somebody speakin' quietly to a dog. Lookin' through my bush, I saw as well as the mist would let me, a man peering through the hedge into the paddock. I was sure o' my man, cock sure.

"'Yis, Maister Chivey,' says I. 'You're in for it this tahme as sure as my name's Jake Benson. I'll mak' yo' stop if I ha' to wing yo' for it.' I rushes out meanin' to seize him by the collar, when the rascal clubbed his gun an' aimed a cracker at me that would ha' made me see stars if it had hit me. I ducked, an' down I fell all my length on the slippery grass. Then he jumps the hedge an' runs for it, an' I efter him. We crossed the paddock as though we were runnin' for t' Doncaster cup. Then I lost him. The mist was settlin' doon, an' I lost scent. Thinks I, he's gotten into t' stack-yard, an' will be dodgin' among t' stacks. Suddenly I popped round a haystack partly cut, an' in the corner I saw a man crouchin' down. Just as I stooped to seize him he jumps up, looks me straight i' the face, wi' such a pale pitiful look, an' says—

"'Benson! for God's sake, let me go!'

"I couldn't ha' held a week-old rabbit, an' off he went into the darkness like a shot. Whoever do you think it was?"

"Why, Chivey, to be sure!" said Tim with a grin; "an' he's chiveyed you ageean an' no mistak'."

"*Tim Crouch! as sure as I'm a livin' sinner, it was Alfred Atheling!* Him as is wanted for forgerin', 'bezzlement, an' half murderin' a p'liceman!"

From this it will be seen that Madam Rumour, true to her lying tongue, had as usual added largely to the poor boy's

offences, and was likely enough, by-and-by, to lay wholesale murder to his charge.

"Well, I *am* blowed!" said Cobbler Tim, speaking under his breath. Then as if the odd expletive had exhausted his powers of speech, he sat with his arms extended and the wax thread taut between, and looked at the gamekeeper in dumb surprise.

"To think that he should ha' ta'en to *poachin'!*" said Benson, in a tone that indicated his opinion that there was positively no deeper depth into which humanity could fall. "I shouldn't ha' thowt it possible. I allus took him to be a good sort of a lad, barrin' bein' a bit wild, but this caps all."

"Poachin'!" said Tim contemptuously. "Not he. He hez ten thoosan' tahmes mair sense. You're oot on it there, 'keeper. Ah see ezac'ly hoo it was. Chivey Ste'enson was the man you saw fost. It was Chivey that tried to club yo' wi' his gun. It was Chivey that gat ower t' paddock hedge an' ran. Then you missed him. Depend on it, he nivver went near t' stackyard; he wadn't be sitch a dodderin' idiot. It wad be runnin' inte t' roondhoose. *He* gav' yo' the slip, 'keeper, an' i' seekin' him, you com' slap on to young Athelıng. But what was *he* aboot? Ah reckon he was yam-sick, an' com' to have a look at t' owd Garth ageean. Poor beggar! He's browt his pigs to a fine market an' no mistak'."

It will be seen from this that Tim was not without a good deal of shrewd discernment, and the tone in which he said 'poor beggar,' betokened true feeling, though the expression was anything but complimentary. Jacob Benson was much impressed by Tim's expression of opinion, and now that Alfred was relieved from the crowning odium of being a poacher, the gamekeeper began to think of him with greater favour.

"Mebbe that is it," he said. "I'll warrant it is, poor lad. Tim, what had I better do?"

"Do?" said Tim, who as a thorough-paced Radical as

became his craft, had a natural antipathy to the law as represented by constables, policemen, magistrates, &c., "why, keep your tongue still, old fellow, an' let the poor lad go."

"Why, I'd rather do that," said Benson. "He was a very nice young fellow. His brother Robert's one of a thoosand; and his mother—right you are, Tim, you an' me 'll niver give her more heartaches than she's gotten already. We'll keep a still tongue aboot it, as you say. Silly lad! noo that I know he hezn't been poachin' I seems to pity him. It's enough to mak' one think wi' Simon Holmes, an' say, 'What a pity it is that the lad wasn't a religious character.'"

"A religious character!" said the cobbler in sarcastic tones. "Ah don't knoa se mitch aboot that. All isn't gold that glitters. There's characters as is religious, an' there's characters as isn't; an' ah'll tell yo' what it is, ah'll finnd yo' them as isn't, that's a precious lot better thrn them as is. That's all ah've gotten to say on that subject. I ain't mitch opinion on 'em myself."

Strange to say, the gamekeeper, who as we have seen rather prided himself on being heterodox, was inclined to take up cudgels for the orthodox belief.

"Why, as for that, Tim, I isn't so sure;" he said. "If I was asked who I think to be the best characters in Aspendale, I should say Simon an' 'Becca Holmes, Mrs. Atheling and Mr. Robert, an' some others, an' if my owd mother had been alive, I should ha' putten her i' the list, an' they're all religious fooaks. What do yo' say to that?"

"Say? why I says this," said Tim, preparing for the fray. "Look at Crimpley the grocer. He goes ivery Sunday to a chapel at Chilworth, 'cause Thorpe Aspen Church isn't good anuff for him; an' he hez prayers in his oan hoose, an' makes a great to do aboot religion in his talk, and yet—Sally! come here!"

Sally came from her kitchen in answer to this call,—her

hands all white with flour, for she was in the first stage of preparing the household bread.

"Noo, Tim, what d'yo' want? Don't keep me botherin' here."

"What was amiss wi' them corran's you got at Crimpley's t'other day?"

"Short weight by nearly two ounces," quoth Sally, "but I took good care he had 'em back."

"What did yo' finnd i' your tea-caddy, when I complained 'at the tea was like drinkin' senna, owd lass?"

"Sloe leaves," said Sally. "Owd Crimpley's a limb o' Satan, for all he's a chapel-goer. Thorpe Aspen Church is good anuff for me, an' a lahtle o' that goes a long way,—but there, I isn't religious."

There was a strong distillation of satire in the last words, and thereupon Sally went back to her bread-making.

"There's a religious character for yo', Jacob," said Tim triumphantly. "They're all alike!"

As if to give prompt denial to his words, the door opened at that instant, and Simon Holmes appeared with a pair of boots in his hand that needed repairs.

"What's all alike, Tim?" said the carpenter, with a smile. "Not your boots, it's to be hoped, for these ha' com' off the welts before they're half worn."

The cobbler was taken aback; but as he did not by any means lack courage, and would not show the white feather before Jacob Benson, he said boldly enough—

"Why, religious fooaks. We've been talking about Jonas Crimpley."

"Why, *he* isn't religious fooaks, is he, Tim? He only weears one hat," said Simon.

"Yis," retorted Tim quickly, "but he weears two feeaces under it."

"Still he isn't religious fooaks, Tim, he's nobbut one,

though he may hev' as many feeaces as a chotch clock," replied Simon, keeping Tim to the mark.

"Why, I was just mentionin' him as a specimen, yo' knoa," quoth the cobbler, "just to give t' 'keeper a idea o' what *my* opinion is aboot 'em,—nut that there isn't exceptions, an' mebbe ah sudn't ha' te go far te finnd yan."

Simon was proof against the implied compliment.

"Oh, that's it," said he innocently. "You pick oot one that you knoa, or think, at ony rate," said he, checking himself, "isn't up to the mark, an' then say that none of 'em are. I've heeard fooaks talk aboot bad logic, and I fancy that's a specimen, as you call it, whether Jonas Crimpley is or no. But that's neither here nor there," he said, changing his tone, as if he was tired of the subject. "Ha' yo' gotten ony apples i' your apple-chaim'er?"

"Yis, a few bushels," replied the cobbler; "what mak's yo' ax?"

"Why, I was wonderin' noo, if you had a chance o' sellin' 'em, whether you can warrant 'em soond an' sweet."

Cobbler Tim began to hope that Simon had been deputed, as on former occasions, to make a bid for the apples, which he wished to sell in readiness for his Christmas rent.

"Oh, they're all right," said he, "ah'll warrant there isn't monny weeasters among 'em."

"Is there one, Tim? Is there one?" said Simon seriously.

"Why, yis, it's varry likely there may be one, mebbe two, but that's neeather here nor there."

"Isn't it?" replied the carpenter. "Tak' my advice, Tim. Empty the lot of 'em into the pig-tub, for if there's a rotten red streak among 'em, they're a bad lot. I'se sorry for yo'. I doot yo' can't spare 'em ower weel."

"What i' the wo'ld are yo' talkin' aboot, Simon?" said the cobbler. "Ah tell yo', that spite o' one or two bad 'uns,

the lot is as sweet an' as soond as if they were still upo' t' trees."

"I'se glad to hear it, Tim, an' I'll try to get yo' a customer for 'em. Noo don't forget that 'religious fooaks,' as you call 'em, may be soond an' sweet in a general way, even when yo' kno' that there's a sprinklin' o' rotten 'uns. But I did think you had mair sense, Tim, than to pick up a rotten apple and say, 'They're all alike.' You mustn't tell fooaks so, or you'll fail to sell your stock."

"That's a good 'un!" said Jacob Benson, who had not soon caught the carpenter's drift. "That's upset your apple-cart, Tim, an' no mistake," and the gamekeeper laughed heartily.

This was more than Tim could well stand; he looked round for his lapstone, afraid that he might be driven to that last resort: but resolved on a desperate effort to regain lost ground.

"Why, you can't deny," said he, "that there's a good monny precious specimens o' the sooart ah meean all aboot. If you do, you're walkin' through the wo'ld wi' your eyes shut. They're as common as toadstools an' a'most as poisonous," and the cobbler made a wry face to express his disgust.

"I nivver denied it," said Simon. "There's sadly ower mony that is not what they owt to be, more's the pity. But talkin' aboot toadstools. Will yo' nivver eat mushrooms 'cause some are so plaguy like 'em? Look here," he continued, pointing to a bad half-crown that the cobbler had nailed to his window sill. "There's a good few o' these aboot, but if I was to offer you a half-crown oot o' my pocket, an' say, 'Here, Tim, here's something for yo',' I reckon yo' wouldn't say, 'No, thank yo', they're all alike.' Coonterfeit coin, neighbour, is a proof that there's some o' the genuine article aboot somewhere. An' then what aboot these boots? Surely there's them that can cobble better

than you, for if they 'are all alike,' then accordin' to present appearances, we shall hev to go barefoot." Here he lifted up the defaulting pair. "Tim," he continued seriously, "you are too shrewd a man to believe such nonsense, and like ninety-nine oot o' ivery hundred glib-tongued talkers agin religion, you know in your conscience that you don't mean what you say."

Before Simon Holmes had finished, Tim Crouch had rubbed his stubbly hair, had seized his hammer and lapstone, and as Simon Holmes and the gamekeeper traversed the darkened road together, they could hear the sharp rap-tap of the cobbler's strokes on the victimised leather.

As the two parted at Simon's gate, the gamekeeper said, "Tim's at it yet, Simon."

"Ay, Jacob," said he, "lapstone logic is a thing you can hammer out for ony length o' time; but I expect he'll spoil the sole."

CHAPTER XIII.

ALFRED ATHELING MEETS WITH STARTLING EXPERIENCES; AND NED SALTMER SHOWS WHAT METAL HE IS MADE OF.

"All is not well. I doubt some foul play."

. . . . . .

"Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind;
The thief doth fear each bush an officer."

Shakespeare.

TIM CROUCH was right in his suspicion that Nick Ste'enson was the poacher pursued by Jacob Benson through the grounds near Aspen Garth, and that Alfred Athelings appearance on the scene was due to quite another and a better cause. That unhappy and unfortunate though sufficiently erring youth had, as we have already seen, come to the conclusion that he must have another look at peaceful Aspendale, and more especially another look at his mother's features in the dear old house at home. It is quite true that hitherto he had seemed to care but little either for the one or the other; but he had had a sharp lesson lately. Like the prodigal, he had to suffer before repentance came, but like the prodigal he had come to himself, and he longed for nothing better than to fall at his mother's feet and crave forgiveness for all the unworthy past.

He had been able in his retirement beneath the roof of

Ned Saltmer to earn sufficient money to provide him with that welcome shelter and with more than frugal fare. He was possessed of very considerable literary gifts. For many years he had used his pen to composition, not for payment but for pleasure. Quite an accumulation of such articles had lodgment in his memory, so far, at least, that they could be readily reproduced by care and pains. He set himself to work at this. He wrote short stories, brief sketches, light essays, and these had sterling merit, and were written in a lively style. For these he was able to find a market, and by the aid of a *nom de plume*, to do this without discovering his identity.

Had it not been for the upbraidings of his conscience, upbraidings that refused to be silenced, and for the fear of detection and its probable consequences, that embittered his daily life, he might have faced the future even on the new lines whereon his sin and folly had compelled him to move. But wrong-doing has always a terrible power to hamper and trammel and disturb the wrong-doer, to darken his horizon, and to take all the enjoyment out of life, even at a long distance from the time and place of his transgressions. Sin is very exacting in its demands, and its bitters are out of all keeping with its short-lived sweets in the matter of duration. Alfred Atheling is not so soon or so easily to be loosed from the toils which his own reckless and wilful hands had thrown around him.

One evening, as he was taking a brisk constitutional after a long day's labour at his desk and papers, he met with an incident that forcibly and cruelly reminded him of the constant perils of his position. He was rounding one of the shady corners within the palings of Victoria Park, when he was suddenly accosted by a well-remembered, and therefore unwelcome voice.

"Hallo, Atheling, old fellow! Why, who would have thought of seeing you so far east? I should have imagined

that I was the only unlucky West-ender condemned to wander in these uncongenial regions. I am here, however, for my sins. How are you, old friend?"

The speaker was an acquaintance with whom he had often played the fool in the days when that employment took up the major portion of his time; a boon companion of his own and Harold Spofforth's, with whom they had consorted in such engagements as had helped to bring our young fugitive to his present pass. His name was Cecil Osborn. He had often been admitted to the chambers in the side street off the Strand, and hence there was no possibility of denying his identity or avoiding further recognition.

"Oh, I'm all right," said Alfred, with an assumption of ease and gaiety which he certainly did not feel. Anxious to turn the inevitable commonplaces of such a meeting from himself he asked—

"What in the world brings you into this quarter of the modern Babylon?"

"Stern necessity, my boy, which, as you and I have often written in our copybooks, knows no law," said the other. "I am not so sure, do you know, of the truth of that old saw. At any rate, I know of one party who would be very glad to supply me with a good deal more law than I desire."

"What do you mean?" said Alfred, feigning an interest which he did not possess.

"Fact is, Atheling, I'm in a fix. Overrun the constable, you know, and all the rest of it: been going the pace too fast; vacuum here, don't you see?" and the speaker slapped his pocket to provide further explanation. "My old nurse, bless her dear heart, furnishes me with a temporary Alsatia. By-the-by, now I come to think of it, you were under a cloud, weren't you? What was it? Oh, I remember: smashing a peeler or something of that sort: saw it in the papers. Confounded bore those papers are: 'Absconded! Fifty

pounds reward!' By George! You should not tempt a poor beggar, hard up as I am, 'pon my word, you shouldn't."

And verily, yea verily, this boon companion and comrade, who could grip hands so easily and warmly, and drink his friend's health so heartily, this jolly good fellow, positively viewed our young outlaw with covetous eyes, and Alfred Atheling felt sure that just then Mr. Cecil Osborn valued his friend and his friend's friendship at—fifty pounds!

At that moment, a policeman, together with another individual in plain clothes, were seen pacing the gravel walk, and approaching them with a slow and, as they thought, a cautious step. Ordinarily this would have meant nothing, and in reality it did mean nothing to either of them; but to our brace of simpletons, each with his own secret to hide, it meant much. "The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth," and both alike were anxious to go their way.

"Well, ta-ta," said Cecil Osborn. "I must be going. Where are you hanging out?"

"Oh, I shall drop on you again, sometime, I dare say," was the reply, and turning on his heel Alfred sought the shelter of Ned Saltmer's cottage by a very devious route so as to reach it unobserved.

He was a good deal flurried, and as soon as he arrived at his own apartments, he heaved a deep sigh of relief, That was quickly followed by another sigh of trouble and concern.

"Now, what am I to do?" he said, "I cannot, must not stop here any longer. I'll go abroad."

So startled was he by this sudden interview with the quondam friend that he could not sleep. He spent the night in laying plans for his departure, and rose unrested and ill at ease.

By that morning's post he received a cheque for certain

contributions to the 'Popular Reader,' and as he needed to make some purchases, he went to the bank on which the cheque was drawn to get it cashed As he came out from thence he pushed the swing door open somewhat suddenly and vigorously, much to the surprise and discomfort of a stalwart policeman who was standing in the lobby, and who got the full effect of that 'movement on flank.'

"Hi, there! Heasily! Heasily!" said he. "I'm not quite as 'ard is hiron. It's a reg'lar case o' 'sault an' battery."

"I sincerely beg your pardon," said Alfred, lifting his face towards the speaker. In these days Alfred Atheling usually wore a downcast look.

It was as much as he could do to maintain his composure, for lo, the two eyes that were looking on him from lowering brows were the eyes of Police Constable Tugwell, whom he had left in Harold Spofforth's dressing-room with a double lock turned on him to keep him there! Again he stammered, hardly knowing what he said—

"I'm sure I beg your pardon."

Tugwell looked at him with a sudden interest. He evidently suspected. Luckily for Alfred, he wasn't sure. Alfred moved away as rapidly as he dared, trying to choose a pace consistent with haste but not with fear. It was as much as he could do to refrain from looking round; and at every step he took he expected to feel a hand upon his shoulder and to hear P. C. Tugwell's stern command to stop. It was long before Alfred was able to look back upon that day without a 'creepy crawly feeling,' and the sensation of the pressure of a policeman's digits on his arm.

Tugwell was cautious. Had he been more cautious on the former occasion Alfred would not have escaped. Tugwell has learned a lesson. He entered the bank and stood at the counter, a man in authority.

"Will you hinform me as to the name of that gentleman

who's just left the bank? Tallish young man with blue heyes. Just gone hout," said he.

He was told that he was a stranger there, but that the name upon the cheque that he had presented was Ralph Ravensworth. Mr. Tugwell was not much the wiser for that.

"It was the very man, I'm a'most sure!" said he, as he left the bank to look along the street in the direction Ralph had taken. "If it is 'im, I should just like to punch 'is 'ead."

Honest Tugwell was not to have that indulgence. Alfred had made the best of his opportunities, and for the present at least was in safe quarters. But it was now more than ever certain that he must go. Without further delay, he gathered together the little substance that belonged to him and set his face towards a far country. In New York he thought he might be safe, and hoped, not without warrant, that the pen of Ralph Ravensworth would maintain him there.

It is needless to say that Ned Saltmer and Madge were sorry to part with him. His genial ways, his Yorkshire sympathies, his ability to talk 'East Ridin,' and so to make music in the ears of the home-loving couple, and especially his appreciation of Madge's housewifery, had endeared him to them both. There was also that other tie, always strong on the part of well-constituted natures,—they had befriended him greatly in the 'day of his calamity,' and so seemed to have a permanent share in him. On the evening before he set out on his long journey, Ned asked him to give him ten minutes' conversation in his own room. Alfred wonderingly, and in truth apprehensively, consented. It was his fate to carry about with him always an accuser in his breast, and that led him to be always on the alert for an accusation from otherwhere.

"Why, now," said Ned, coming to the point at once, "it's

just here. You've trusted me, an' I've trusted you; an' I don't think that either on us is ony the woss for that."

"Indeed, I'm grateful, from the bottom of my soul," said Alfred warmly. "You've been a true friend to me."

"I want to be, an' I will be," said Ned. "If you believe it, give me your hand on it." Needless to say it was heartily gripped.

"Now, then, all's clear sailin'," said Ned. "The long an' the short of it is, Mr. Alfred Atheling, I know you. I knew you i' the coffee-house the first day I saw you in London."

Alfred looked at him in dumb surprise, and thought what a fool's paradise he had been living in, so far as his notions of seclusion were concerned.

"I don't wonder," said Ned, "at your looking like that. It'll make no difference to me. I'm a Chilworth man, I am, an' I used to be journeyman wi' Simon Holmes o' Thorpe Aspen. He was buildin' a new farmstead for Farmer Holroyd o' Aspen Grange, leastwise for Sir Godwin Spofforth, his landlord. Don't you remember when you used to be hevin' your holidays, how you used to come when we was hevin' dinner, an' tell us tales, whoppers they was, some of 'em; an' crack jokes till we a'most died o' laughin'?"

Alfred's face had become red and white by turns, and all the while honest Ned was speaking he thought how entirely he had been at his mercy. Still his confidence was not shaken, and he replied with a smile—

"Now you mention it, I call it to mind. Those were merrier days than these," and as he spoke Alfred sighed heavily.

"Never mind," said Ned, misunderstanding the origin of that sigh. "You ha' no cause to trouble that I knows you. I liked you then, an' I like you now, an' so does my Madge. An' seein' that you're under a cloud, as you said yourself, I don't mind sayin' that me an' Madge is a good

deal troubled about yo' ; more especially as you ha' been so down i' the dumps these last few days. You've no call to fear that there's any danger of our lettin' out anything we know. I isn't goin' to ask where you are goin', because that might look suspicious-like, an' most likely it's best we shouldn't know ; an' I isn't goin' to persuade you not to go, because I think it's quite likely you're right to move away. But I is goin' to say this, an' what I says I means,—whenever you want a corner to set down in, or a plain man to do you a friendly turn, an' a good little woman to mak' you welcome, Number fourteen Woodstock Street, Victoria Park, is the spot for you. Will you give me your hand on it?"

They were very honest and genuine tears that stood in Alfred's eyes as he looked in Ned's face, took again the proffered hand and said—

"I will, Ned, and thank you from the bottom of my heart. If ever I need a refuge I'll seek it with you."

It was a few days after this conversation that Alfred, still starving with home-hunger, ventured to find his way to Aspen Garth, to snatch a glimpse of the hearth around which were gathered those who, now that a great gulf lay between him and them, were dear to him as life, ay, dearer, for it was more for their sakes, their name, their reputation, than for his own safety, that he shunned what he fully believed would be his if he surrendered—a convict's fate.

Protected from observation by the early winter dark and the thick mist that lay upon the ground, he had seen the dear old room with its cosy ingles, its flickering beech logs, whose flames lighted up each well-remembered picture on the walls. He had seen the calm, sad features and silver hair of his mother as she sat in her accustomed chair. He had seen the brighter, cheerier face of his sister Clara, and the frank, open countenance of his brother Edgar. Robert,

his good, noble, large-hearted elder brother, he did not see. He gazed through the window until his face seemed glued to the pane, until the vision was blurred out by scalding tears. He felt as though he must rush in and steal one last embrace. But then came the thought that by so doing he should make them partakers of his peril, and possibly bring them within reach of the law, for not surrendering him to the justice he had defied. While still he paused uncertain what to do, he was alarmed by approaching footsteps and sped swiftly to the stackyard to hide from view. Then it was that Jacob Benson, in hot pursuit of 'Chivey' Ste'enson, mistook him for the poacher and stretched his hand to take him.

Fearful of being recognised, Alfred had crouched into the angle of the haystack made by the knife to supply the cattle with fodder. With an involuntary appeal upon his lips he sprang out into the darkness with a darker night within him, and fled away, away from home and friends, to meet an unknown future on a foreign strand. But the bitter cup he was called upon to drink had not yet received all its unpalatable ingredients. As he sped along the Chilworth road he overtook the poacher who had been the quarry that Jacob Benson would fain have brought down. That worthy in his turn mistook him for the keeper in hot pursuit. He turned on Alfred with a passionate oath and laid his hand upon his gun to repel attack. Alfred was taken by surprise and stood in silence for a moment. That moment was sufficient for Chivey to recognise him. Alfred's face was ghastly white, and even through the night the poacher saw that it wore a hunted look. The poacher could sympathise with that; he had had to run many a gauntlet of keepers, policemen, and keepers' men. Only the rough side of his human kindred had been turned towards him, or he might have been other and better than he was. A sudden impulse of sympathy with a

brother outlaw made him lower his gun and say as he stood aside to let the young man pass—

"Gan yer ways, for all me—hawks sudn't pick oot hawks' een; an' a hunted fox sudn't peril a fox's brush."

Stung to the quick by the humiliating comparison, Alfred did not stay to recognise the better feeling that prompted it, but passed on into the deepening shadow, the very incarnation of shame and humiliation. Thence he hasted to Liverpool and took ship for the Western Continent. There he hoped to enter on a new career and to live a nobler and a better life. He resolved to write home as soon as he had landed, and say that much at any rate, to sow the seeds of hope at home. Thanks to the pious principles which had always been in the ascendant at Aspen Garth, the young prodigal felt a real yearning after better things. Ere he left his native land he had vowed that, by the help of God, he would

> "Build a new life upon a ruined life,
> And make the future fairer than the past,
> And make the past appear a troubled dream."

It is a worthy object, but in such a case as his, can it be attained? That question Alfred Atheling asked himself full oft, and feared even while he hoped. That fear well guarded will haply help him in his task.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROBERT ATHELING SETS OUT UPON HIS QUEST; AND THE FAITHFUL JOSS ELECTS TO KEEP HIM COMPANY.

"Yet there are pangs of keener woe,
Of which the sufferers never speak,
Nor to the world's cold pity show
The tears that scald the cheek,
Wrung from their eyelids by the shame
And guilt of those they shrink to name,
Whom once they loved with cheerful will,
And love, though fallen and branded, still."

W. C. Bryant.

HAVING fairly installed his brother Edgar in the management of the farm, Robert Atheling felt himself free to travel to the world's end, if needs be, in fulfilment of the pledge he had given his honoured father on his dying bed. He remained one whole day in seclusion in his own old-fashioned bedroom, with its odd corners and slanting roof and its manifold tokens of comfort and even of luxury, putting to rights his own papers and those concerning family affairs. There, too, he spent solemn hours, pleading with Heaven that his steps might be guided aright, directed to the whereabouts of his wandering brother, and that his mission might be crowned with full success.

The next morning, after taking an affectionate farewell of his household, he took the crutch-handled stick which had been his father's prop in his declining years,—his portmanteau had been sent on before him,—and whistling to keep his courage up he passed through the gates of Aspen Garth. Then he turned his face to the great city, amid whose teeming multitudes he hoped to light upon the lost sheep who had wandered so far astray from virtue, home, and God.

He might have driven to the Chilworth station in his own well-appointed dogcart drawn by his favourite black mare,—he had a wonderful affection for the dumb animals of which he was ever a kindly master—an affection implicitly returned; but the morning was fine and frosty and the roads good, so he preferred to walk. A turn in the road soon hid from sight the departing traveller, who trudged along the highway to catch the next train to town. As he passed along the village street he was joined by Simon Holmes. The carpenter explained that he had business down the valley, and that if Robert had no objection he would walk along with him. I fancy, however, that the old man had improvised the 'business' that he might transact a little business of another and a higher kind.

"Good mornin', Mr. Robert," said Simon. "Then you're off at last. I've gotten a little matter o' business to see to down at Farmer Green's. Shall I bother yo' if I go along wi' yo'?"

"Scarcely that, old friend," said Robert. "I was glad to get away alone from my own folks. It would only have made the parting harder and longer if any of them had come with me. But with you it's different. You will not do other than give me a helping hand and a word of cheer."

"Nay, marry," said Simon. "I've been prayin' to God to speed yo' iver since I woke, an' it's scarcely likely that I should go agin my own petitions. Not that I've ony

manner o' doot aboot the upshot. You don't go a warfare at your own cost, an' them that's gotten a errand sitch as yours, an' sitch a startin' point as yours, can't varry weel fail o' their purpose. When the good Providence o' God begins a thing, He's pratty sartain to be in at the finish. Man's purposes are often brokken off, but His hev' a way o' gettin' theirselves roonded off intiv a completeness that leeaves nowt to be desired. If iver a man had a certificate for action an' a passport for travel that's not to be easily interfered with, it's you."

"Well, yes, Simon," responded Robert, "it does seem as though duty is pretty clearly marked out for me in this instance; and I will not doubt that, though the path of duty may be hard to travel, it will lead to the right end at last."

"Ay, that it will, you may depend on't: an' Him that bids yo' walk on it 'll see that your wallet isn't short o' refreshment, an' He'll put yo' a few wayside inns for rest an' comfort as yo' go. You knoa Who it is that says, 'I will guide thee with mine eye.' He never mak's a mistak'; an' if His eye leads on to labour, it mak's all pleasant because it's breet wi' the leet of His love."

"I know it, Simon," replied Robert, straightway walking with a bolder step. "I can honestly say, 'I go in the strength of the Lord God.'"

"That's the wind that wafts to harbour, Mr. Robert. I was at Hull t'other day, standin' on t' South End pier. I saw a ship come sailin' up the Hummer, sailin' fair i' t' sunleet wi' all her sails bellied out i' t' breeze, an' she just glided into harbour an' dropped her anchor, an' the crew gav' a great shoot as if they were sayin', 'We've weathered the storm an' we're seeafe i' port!' I couldn't help thinkin' o' you an' your mission. I says to myself, The prayers of his honoured faythe an' his godly mother, let alone his oan, 'll fill his sails, and all Thorpe Aspen 'll shoot him a wel-

come when he drops anchor at Aspen Garth with his brother Alfred in tow. Besides you won't forget that there's them left behind that 'll nivver forget yo' at the Throne of Grace, *nivver!* You won't forget that, will you, Mr. Robert?"

"No fear of that, dear friend," said the young man, with a full heart. "And nobody can value such help more than I. Thank you for the courage with which your words have inspired me. I shall not forget them."

The carpenter had now reached the homestead of Farmer Green whither his 'business' had led him.

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Robert, an' God bless yo'," said he, "an' if your courage should ivver seeam inclined to droop a bit, an' it may, for you aren't meeade of iron, an' t' rooad may be a goodish bit rough, remember that 'Thy shoes shall be iron an' brass, an' as thy day is thy strength shall be.'"

The young man grasped the carpenter's hand in silence, and permitted the tearful sparkle in his own eyes to intimate his affectionate farewell. Now Robert was the owner of a fine collie dog, which answered to the name of Joss, and which was even more distinguished for fidelity and canine intelligence than the generality of his clever and faithful tribe. Of course Joss never dreamed that *he* was to be left behind, and it was only by dint of apparent anger and the threat of Robert's staff that the dog was induced with cowering head and drooping tail to creep back to Edgar's side. Arrived at the station, Robert found that he was only just in time to catch the train, which moved slowly into the station just as he was taking his ticket. A porter opened the door of a carriage for him, when Joss, who had followed his master in cunning silence and at a carefully measured distance, leaped in before him.

"Now then be quick please, sir?" said the station master, half pushing Robert into the compartment.

The whistle sounded, the train started, and so, much to the young man's annoyance, Joss was perforce his fellow-traveller to London. There was something so thoroughly comical and sensible in the odd semi-side squint which the four-footed offender gave his master, as he put back his ears and held his tail in horizontal stiffness as if he did not dare to wag it, that Robert could not help smiling in spite of his vexation.

This was quite enough for Joss. The tail became eloquent in an instant: his ears were pricked, and his fore feet placed upon his master's knees. By every substitute for speech the faithful Joss possessed, he deprecated an expected scolding. No sooner was he rewarded by a forgiving pat than he uttered one glad, short, exultant bark, and then retreated underneath the seat as if resolved to show that he knew his place and intended to give no further trouble. When the train came to a final standstill in the London terminus, Joss came forth from voluntary durance and marched at his owner's heels with the air of a dog that could well take care of himself and of his master too.

Having secured for himself a comfortable location in a large boarding-house near the King's Cross station, Robert Atheling's next business was to obtain an interview with Hudson Harvey, Esq., M.P., for whom Alfred had acted as private secretary, and from whom the money had been taken which had placed Alfred in peril and given such bitter grief to all his friends Mr. Hudson received Robert with evident coldness in the first instance, for he was with good reason very wroth with the young wrongdoer, who had rendered such an ill return for all his kindliness and trust. But Mr. Hudson was a just man—a man of warm sympathies, and it was not long before he estimated his visitor aright and treated him with confidence and respect.

"The facts of the case, Mr. Atheling, are just these,"

said he, "I had for some months felt grieved and dissatisfied with your brother's negligence and inattention to duty. I gently remonstrated, and then sharply rebuked him—not with much result, I am sorry to say. But I remembered my poor boy's affection for him as his tutor, and bore with a course of conduct which I certainly should not have borne from anybody else. Then came errors and deficiencies in his accounts, for which he accounted in a lame and unsatisfactory way. At last, on examining matters closely, I discovered that a sum of several hundred pounds, which I had entrusted to him on the morning of a day on which he had asked for a holiday, had never reached the bank at all. On the first sign of discovery, your brother took himself off, and there the matter stands at this day. It is very painful for me to say it. It is very painful for you to hear it; but the facts are too clear for doubt, and your brother is a guilty and dishonoured man. The matter is now in the hands of the police, and though I deeply sympathise with you and your aged mother, I don't see, now, how I can further interfere."

"Believe me, sir," said Robert, "I do not desire to suggest that you should do anything but what is right. All that can be asked of you, in case my brother is found, is to be merciful as the prosecutor, and to help me to minimise the consequences of his sad offence. One thing I can do, one thing I am commissioned by his mother to do; that I am sure you will agree to for the sake of the good name of his relations. Kindly inform me what the deficiency is that is fairly traceable to his misdoings, and let me give you a cheque for the full amount. That, at any rate, is quite consistent with your freedom of action in the interests of public justice."

"I am quite willing," said Mr. Harvey, "to do as you wish, and further, I am quite ready to promise that so far as lies in my power, I will endeavour to lighten the punish-

ment meted out to him. If I can honourably save him from imprisonment, I will."

There was something so honest and transparent about Robert Atheling that Mr. Harvey 'took to him' as we use to say, asked him to lunch, and finally, of his own accord, he intimated that the offer of a reward for Alfred's capture should be withdrawn.

"As far as I am concerned," said he, "your brother shall have another opportunity of redeeming his character."

It may well be imagined that Robert Atheling returned to his quarters much relieved in his mind as to one portion of his mission to town. So evidently was this the case, that Joss, who had long been aware that his master was under a cloud of trouble, speedily discerned the gleam of returning sunshine to his face. The journey from Mayfair to King's Cross afforded him an excellent opportunity of throwing off the sympathetic gloom which had shadowed his doggish mind. He leaped, he gambolled, he set off on a swift chase after an imaginary hare, wheeled suddenly round, and came at speed to give his beloved master a congratulatory salute. Altogether, Joss behaved himself in such a way as to astonish the Londoners who tramped the pavement with a view of what a free-born British dog, fresh from the wolds of Aspendale, could do even in the heart of roaring London town.

"All right, Joss," said Robert, with a smile, and then the shadow fell again as he continued, "but there's a good deal to do yet, old dog, before we can see Aspen Garth again."

And at that moment, where was Alfred Atheling? Dead and buried, so far as that name was concerned, for he had laid it aside, doubting whether he should ever wear it any more. After his sad and tearful vision of Aspen Garth, his sudden evanishment from the presence of Jacob Benson, and his startling interview with Chivey Ste'enson, he had

made his way to Chilworth, from thence to a western port, and at that moment was on the high seas bound for America as Ralph Ravensworth. That name he meant to make honourable, to wear worthily, and to use his undoubted talents, not only for his own sustenance, but for the well-being of his kind.

Meanwhile, thanks to many prayers and the efforts of Sir Jarvis Mainwaring and Doctor Feltham Greaves, Ethel Spofforth's recovery became rapid. One unusually soft and mild morning in January—it seemed as though bleak winter had mildened to give her special greeting—she walked out of her long imprisonment, leaning on the arm of her father, free to come and go at her own sweet will. As they walked along the sunny and sheltered side of the Hall, Ethel heaved a sigh so deep-drawn as to elicit from her father an inquiry into its cause.

"What are you thinking of, my dear," said the baronet, "to produce such a sigh as that?"

"I was thinking of Harold, father. Do you know, I think God has raised me from the grave that I may go and fetch him home?"

The baronet shook his head. He was unable to reach her clear, full height of faith; neither could he think with complacency of her departure from him now that she had just been brought back to him from the shadowed chamber in which she had lain so long. And yet he could not hide from himself that the hand of God was directly visible in her wondrous restoration. His measure of light was but as a feeble glimmer, but the question would force itself upon him—was it for some special purpose? She had come back at a bound from the very gates of the grave. Had she come again to the kingdom of life 'for such a time as this?' Moreover, Harold's return and reformation were all that were required, he thought, to make him happy and content.

The fact was that in Ethel's mind there was no doubt, no

question She believed in her commission as really and as firmly as if it had been written with the finger of God on a table of stone, and she had equal confidence in her ultimate success. Now she was trying to familiarise her father with the thought.

"I can't see that, my darling," said Sir Godwin after a lengthy pause. "Now that I seem to have received you back after a long, long journey, deeper and deeper into the shadow, I feel as though I cannot bear that you should go from me any more. I need you, dear, in more ways than one, and I am looking forward to a closer confidence, soul to soul, between you and me than was ever so before."

This was doubly sweet to Ethel. She knew intuitively at what her father was hinting, and her heart beat fast as she thought that he too was being drawn towards rest and righteousness by the magnet of the Cross.

"Besides," he continued, "you know how self-willed your brother is; how passionate and proud. He would be sure to resist any such attempt to curb him as the sending of his sister after him. The very idea would be enough to constrain him to increase the distance between himself and home. I dearly wish he would return, for I greatly need his aid in the management of the estate. We can but hope that he will weary of his foolishness by-and-by, and come back of his own accord."

"But you don't seem to remember, father dear, that if it is God's will that I should be the means of bringing him to a better mind, God can put him so that he cannot get away from me, and can put into his mind, when he sees me, a wish to come home with me. If it is right for me to go, it will be made right for him to come. I cannot doubt that, you know. I can never get rid of this feeling; I hear it like a voice all the time, 'Go and fetch your brother!' Think what a happy day for us all that will be when we three are altogether at dear old Aspen Chase."

The baronet could not argue. He would only doubt and wonder; and wonder until his doubts were staggered. A little while they walked in silence. Then Ethel said—

"Father dear, you said just now, 'We can but hope.' Is there not one other thing that we can do? Both of us, I mean. If it is right to hope for anything, it must be right to pray for it. I never go to sleep at night, I never wake from sleep at morn but I say, 'Lord, bring brother Harold home again!' And do you know, that always helps my hope. And when I pray like that, then the voice comes to me again and again, 'Go and fetch your brother home.' Dear father! It will be right for me to go. But don't trouble. When the time comes, and the way is open, I think you will be willing too."

Then the two withdrew into the house again, the maiden to pray and hope and wait; the silent baronet to pray, too, though no one knows it but himself and his God; and more and more to ponder these things in his heart.

God aid and guard thee, gentle Ethel. Of thee it may well be said as of thy trustful sister on Zidon shores, 'O woman, great is thy faith!' Thy errand will carry thee far away; up rugged hills and down dark valleys, through brake and briar, and the way at times will be hard walking for thy tender feet. Yet, 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' Looking on thy vacant couch and with that wondrous '*Talitha cumi*' echoing in our ears, we cannot, dare not do other than say, 'Go in this thy might!'

CHAPTER XV.

PETER PROUT MAKES MERRY IN HIS MILL; AND SIMON HOLMES LISTENS TO A SONG OF HIS OWN COMPOSING.

"Now, good Cæsario, but that piece of song,
That old and antique song we heard last night;
Methought it did relieve my passion much,
More than light airs and recollected terms
Of these most brisk and giddy-pated times.
Come, but one verse."

Shakespeare.

A FRESH north-west wind was blowing, steadily and strong, and the sails of Peter Prout's mill, for that thrifty knight of the mealsack was able to whirl his millstones by the agency either of wind or water, were careering in rapid circles on their elevated axis. The rattle of the 'hoppers,' and the general rumble of the machinery, gave sufficient token that the grain was being turned to grist at a famous rate, and that white flour or the browner meal of barley was flowing in abundance down the wooden spouts and into the open bags so placed as to receive it as it fell.

Peter himself, whose rubicund cheeks were toned down by a plentiful powdering of the white dust that proclaimed his calling, was standing against one of the aforesaid spouts with his hand in the warm current of descending meal. He slowly passed his broad thumb across it, as it fell on his

fingers, to see that the upper and nether millstones were doing their work aright, and that the flour was sufficiently fine for the work for which it was intended.

Now Peter the miller was also Peter the musical, and seeing that matters in the mill were moving along so merrily, what could be more natural than that he should wax merry too? Loudly, cheerily, briskly, and heartily, as though he would keep match and measure with the sounds around him, he sang

THE MILLER'S SONG.

"Come let us be merry! come let us be cheery!
Come drive away sorrow and care;
Old Care is a foe, sir; then let's bid him go, sir,
And say, 'Come again if you dare.'
No good comes of sighing, or sobbing, or crying—
No ill can be mended by that;
And folks that go whining, and grumbling, and pining,
Had better go laugh and grow fat.

"By looking at trouble, you make it grow double—
It steals all the light from the sky;
Look out for the sun, sir, as sure as a gun, sir,
You'll see the dark cloud passing by.
To brood over crosses, and trials, and losses,
Will make you as thin as a rat;
That never will cure 'em, nor help to endure 'em,
It's better to laugh and grow fat.

"Then let us be merry, for sure it is very
Unwise to be moody and mum.
To put a good face on a trouble will brace one
To keep it well under the thumb.
The doubtful and fearful, the anxious and tearful,
Are sure to be wretched—that's pat.
Be hopeful and cheery, and then, without query,
You'll know how to laugh and grow fat."

"Very well sung, miller! very well sung!" said Simon

Holmes the carpenter, who, all unknown to Peter, had come in time to hear the song, and was standing in the doorway with a meaning smile upon his face.

"Very well sung, neighbour. But I ha' my doots aboot the moral on it or the science eeather. If King Solomon is to be trusted, an' he's reckoned a bit of an authority on them questions, laughter is offen only another name for madness, an' growin' fat's a thing that you may easily hev' ower mitch on. It may be a nat'ral ambition for a maggot, but as it can't sing t' prescription dizn't fit. The Bible says 'at Jeshurun, who was only moderately manageable while he was thin, kicked as soon as he 'waxed fat,' an' as that sort o' kickin' is generally agin t' pricks, there's mair pain then pleasure to be gained by t' job."

"Hallo, Simon Holmes!" said the miller in mock surprise. "Ah shouldn't ha' sung that stave if ah'd knoan 'at you were within earshot. That soort o' music isn't mitch i' your line, is it? Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, eh? Them's your favourites. Ah don't mitch matter 'em; ah like something jollier, myself. Hymns is rayther milk-an'-wattery, ah allus thinks. A merry ditty noo an' then, when you're i' loa watter, or ha' gotten a fit o' the blues, gives yo' a fillip, like, an' helps yo' on."

"Deary me!" said Simon drily. "Diz it really? Hoo often did yo' sing a merry ditty last winter, Peter, when you were twinged wi' rheumatics, an' had to keep your chair a month or mair? Ha, ha! I think I see yo' leeanin' back on t' cushion, rubbin' your swelled knuckles, an' sweeatin' wi' pain, an' singin' all t' tahme, 'Come let us be merry!'"

Peter Prout could not keep his powdered cheeks from reddening at this sally; for if ever mortal man groaned and whined in this world the rheumatic miller did when the twinge was in his bones. To this fact Simon had often been an ear-witness, for there were few homes in Aspendale

in which he had not been a constant and welcome visitor in the days of sorrow and suffering. Peter Prout's usually over-ready tongue had not an answer at command. He well remembered the old carpenter's thoughtful kindness and efficient aid, willingly rendered in those dark days. Simon quietly smiled to see the miller put to a non-plus. It was an unusual experience for him. Peter was especially apt at a smart reply, and the more it smarted the better he was pleased. The engineer was hoist with his own petard.

"It's easy anuff, miller, to sing sorgs o' that sooart, an' I ain't nowt to say ageean it, i' reeason, when there's plenty o' wind i' the sails, an' plenty o' corn i' the mill. But that ditty would soond raythor doleful, I fancy, if wind an' watter booath stopt comin', an' showed no signs o' changin' their mind."

"Hang it, man," said the miller, "there wad be something else to think aboot then."

"That's true anuff," said Simon, "but all the thinkin' i' t' wo'ld wadn't mak' t' wind bloa or t' watter run. A good song, noo, o' the right sooart might seem to shorten the tahme a bit. I remember once goin' to see old Jenny Benson, that's t' 'keeper's mother yo' knoa', when she was bed-ridden wi' hurtin' her hip in a fall. It wore her oot at last, dear old soul. The poor woman was propped up i' bed wi' pillows an' was lyin' all by herself. I thowt I could hear some singin', an' I stood wi' my hand on t' door-sneck an' my thumb on t' latch an' listened. This is what I heeard her sing:—

"'In hope of that immortal crown
I now the Cross sustain,
And gladly wander up and down
And smile at toil and pain.
I suffer out my threescore years,
Till my Deliverer come,
And wipe away His servant's tears,
And take His exile home.'

Dear old woman! she wasn't mitch of a singer; but all things considered, it was aboot as sweet a 'ditty' as a man could listen to. Peter, old friend, which song's best, yours or Jenny's?"

It is difficult to say what the miller's answer would have been, for the question was a home-thrust. Just then, however, a third individual entered the mill.

"Mornin', miller," said Jacob Benson, for it was the stalwart gamekeeper that had joined them. "My word, but this is a grand wind to fill your sails! You're coinin' money to day, I'll warrant. It's anuff to mak' yo' sing t' old song:—

"'Merrily sings the miller's wife,
Merrily sings the miller;
Merrily doth the mill go round,
The mill that coins the siller.'"

"Right you are, Jacob," said the miller briskly, for he felt that an ally had come to help him in his need, and was almost as grateful as Wellington at Waterloo when longed-for Blucher came upon the scene.

"Simon Holmes popped in," continued Peter, "just as ah was singin'; an' just because it wasn't a hymn, he dropt doon o' ma' like a thoosand o' bricks. One can't ailus be singin' t' Owd Hundred, can we? Specially in a gallopin' wind like this, an' t' meal comin' doon t' spout like a mill-race."

"Oh, he's a kill-joy, Simon is," said Jacob, willing to indulge in a little banter, "it's allus the way wi' your religious fooaks—

"'It's well to sigh,
And pipe your eye,
For by-and-by
You're sure to die.'

That's the way they sing," said the gamekeeper, after he had

droned the highly original lines through his nose to make them more effective. "One would think that they were allus practisin' for a buryin'."

All this was 'egg and milk' to the miller, to use one of his favourite expressions, and he greeted the gamekeeper's nasal music with uproarious laughter.

"Nay, nay," said Simon, with imperturbable good temper, "Peter hezn't put it fairly. I can do with a cheerful song as weel as onybody. Nowt's to be gained by checking a lively flight so long as it's kept within boonds. Peter was right anuff to sing at his work—I wish fre' my heart that he allus may. An' I don't want to be hearin' hymns an' psalms and nowt else. I heeard a poor Scotchman singin' 'Auld Lang Syne' i' Chilworth Street t' other day, an' I declare I was fairly foorced to tears. All I said was that to 'laugh and grow fat' wasn't varry mitch worth aimin' at. In that case we sud ha' to stop laughin' altegither, or we should get as roond as a barrel and ha' to waddle like a duck. Why there's yourself, Peter, you're stoot anuff i' all conscience. If your prescription's right you mustn't laugh ony mair, or you'll be as podgy as a sack o' floor."

Hereupon all three of them went off into laughter, and peace was tacitly proclaimed.

"I've written a few songs myself," said Simon, "as you knoa, but the worst on't is that I can't sing 'em when they are written, not bein' gifted i' that way as Peter is. There's few that can sing better then him."

"That's true, Simon," said the miller. "Ah don't meean aboot my singin', though ah can manage that better then some."

This was very modestly put, for Peter was very proud of his powers in this direction, and was vastly pleased with the carpenter's compliments.

"But aboot them songs o' yours," continued the miller, "all of 'em owt to be printed in a book. Do yo' remember

sendin' a piece o' poetry to the *York Herald*, Simon, called 'A Workman's Song,' an' signed at t' bottom 'A Village Carpenter'?"

"Oh yes," said Simon, well pleased to find that the efforts of his muse were not forgotten. "I shouldn't ha' thowt you would ha' remembered it."

Now if there was one weakness to which my friend and favourite Simon Holmes might well plead guilty, it was in the shape of liking to hear and know that his poetry was held in good repute. I know that this is the case with *his* old friend and favourite, I may say that much, and I think the village carpenter may be 'pardoned for this thing.'

"Remember it!" said Peter Prout in reply to the carpenter's observation, "come and look here!"

Hereupon Simon's attention was directed to a cutting from a newspaper which had been carefully pasted on to the upright beam to which the meal-spout was attached. It was placed just above the latter, so that Peter could stand and read it the while he was passing the meal through the testing process between his finger and thumb. Simon Holmes was delighted to find that it was the very poem they had been talking about.

"Ah call it a ratlin' good 'un," said the miller. "I cut it oot o' t' newspaper, an' claimed it on there, seca that ah could get it off as ah was mindin' t' mill."

"Deary me!" said Simon, casting a furtive glance at Jacob Benson to see whether he was an interested listener. "An' can yo' sing it, Peter? 'Pon my word, I should like to hear yo'."

"Sing it? hey. Why, bless yo', it's my Sunday hymn. Ah seean fan' a tune to fit it. Ah'll sing it; but just wait a minute, ah mun slacken sail a bit."

The miller proceeded to half-furl the narrow strips of canvas so as to give the wind less hold upon them. Then the three seated themselves before the fire with their backs

turned to meal-stream, balance balls and revolving wheels, and Peter Prout sang

THE WORKMAN'S SONG.

"I am poor, I know, I am very poor,
As poor as a man need be;
But my Saviour was poorer still than I,
I never so poor as He.
I toil for my bread, I toil for my wife,
I toil for my children three,
But hard as I toil, He toiled as hard
In the valleys of Galilee.

"My raiment is coarse, and I'm rude of speech,
Of learning full little have I:
But I think that He loves me no less for that,
And I'll tell you the reason why.
His carpenter's tunic was coarser than mine,
His country talk was as rough;
And of learning, away in His Nazareth home,
I guess He had little enough.

"He lived in a cottage, and so do I;
He hardened His hand at the tool;
With His clothes to earn and His bread to win,
He hadn't much time for school.
I warrant, like me, He oft longed for rest,
The fall of the Sabbath eve,
When the holy day, from His toil and moil,
Brought with it a glad reprieve.

"But soon as He taught on the mountain slope,
With the grass for a pulpit floor,
He lifted on high His toil-worn hands,
Saying, 'Blessed shall be the poor.'
And blessed we are, for He cares for us,
Stoops low to be one with us all;
So I love Him, and trust Him, and go my way
Until I shall hear Him call.

"Then I'll climb the ladder of gold, I ween,
While the angels are looking down;
And my God, my Saviour, the Carpenter's Son,
Shall give to me mansion and crown.
Come much, then, come little, to spend or to spare,
I tell you it matters not which,
For Jesus, in love to me, made Himself poor,
That I in His love may be rich!"

The miller could sing, and well. The song was well worth hearing. Its author, the delighted carpenter, declared roundly that he always had thought that it was 'rayther a goodish piece;' but that he had never liked it half so well as now that *it* had been rendered so effectively by Peter Prout.

"Thenk y'," Peter, thenk yo'," said he, "I shall ha' to mak' another piece o' purpose to get you to sing it."

But Simon's greatest satisfaction after all was in watching Jacob Benson, Jenny Benson's graceless son, while the song was being sung. He saw the gamekeeper's lip quiver, and a tell-tale tear trickle down his cheek. His looks said, as plain as could be, "That's the sort of music if we only knew how to make it." Simon Holmes could have put him in the way of producing it. Though that good man could not sing himself, he could be and was the cause of song in others. Ethel Spofforth, to wit, the 'caged bird,' whose melody Sir Jarvis Mainwaring could admire, but failed to understand.

CHAPTER XVI.

DON ANTONIO DE DIAZ EFFECTS AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE; AND HAROLD SPOFFORTH BEMOANS HIS HARD FATE.

"Pleasures are like poppies spread;
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snowflake on the river,
A moment white, then melts for ever;
Or like the Borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Evanishing amid the storm."

Burns.

HAROLD SPOFFORTH, the foolish and spendthrift heir of Aspen Chase, was enjoying himself, at least he would have said so, in the gay saloons of Paris. Here he had resumed his acquaintance with a certain dashing cavalier whom he had first met some few seasons before at Homburg, a place of evil name and fame. Don Antonio de Diaz was a Spaniard in whose veins ran, at least he said so, the bluest of blue blood. He was possessed of handsome features, an aristocratic air, eminent social qualities, a long purse, and a special acquaintance with the more piquant features of Parisian life. All these, in the estimation of Harold Spofforth, were high-class certificates. Harold was on his way to Spain, intending to proceed to Madrid, after quaffing

for a brief season the Circean bowl which, as Don Antonio expressively declared, "the vivacious French people knew how to mix so skilfully."

Now as Spain was the bourne to which the young Englishman was journeying, he felt that he could not do better than attach himself still more closely to the Spanish Don. His friendship was well worth cultivating, and as the warm-hearted son of the South had similar views and feelings, they looked forward to spending many pleasant days together in the Spanish capital. Under Don Antonio's stimulating influence, Harold's ready cash disappeared with even unwonted rapidity. That favourite motto with this class of individuals, 'A short life and a merry one,' comes very expensive in more ways than one, and is generally followed by bankruptcy of more kinds than one, bankruptcies that cannot possibly be whitewashed in any courts of law. It is a sort of galloping consumption, which includes money, health, and morals in its fatal race to ruin.

Under the genial and fascinating Spaniard's guidance Harold drew upon his father for fresh supplies. No sooner were these new funds in hand, than he and the friend who was to be his guide into the inner courts of the Spanish Temple of Pleasure, took their departure. Don Antonio seemed to wax more brilliant and delightful as a fellow traveller and comrade the further they left the French capital behind them.

"There is no need," said he, "why we should travel post haste as if we were couriers pioneering the way for royalty. As for the steam-engine and the train, they simply reduce you to a parcel, and you are transmitted through the air so fast that you can make no more observation of the country through which you pass, and reap no more pleasure from your journey, than a parcel can. Our glorious Spain, my dear Señor Spofforth, deserves far different treatment. Its marvellous beauties must be taken in piecemeal. Let

us travel zigzag. Let us get out of the beaten track, and study nature's charms at our ease. I can show you a few out-of-the-way places, altogether unknown to the mere tourist and sightseer, that are gems of the first water, as you will be delighted to acknowledge. Besides this, there are contiguous hostels in the shape of certain baronial castles and country quarters of long-tried friends of my own. There we shall find cooks of the first order, cellars of old wine, and damosels and donnas of the cherriest lips and starriest eyes."

There was no resisting such a picture as this, certainly such resisting power did not dwell in Harold Spofforth's moral constitution. That infatuated votary of pleasure congratulated himself continually that he had happed upon such a guide, philosopher, and friend. He saw in himself a happier Alexander, who, like the Grecian monarch, had already conquered a world of pleasure, and unlike him, had now new worlds of bliss to conquer. He expressed his thanks to his obliging companion without stint or limit, and announced his entire willingness to follow loyally and gladly wheresoever he might lead. Whereupon the Don's eyes flashed with a merry light, and his gleaming white teeth flashed also as he parted his lips to smile. A careful observer might have read something else than merriment in that gleam. Harold Spofforth, however, made no pretensions to that character.

By-and-by, according to mutual agreement, the ordinary beaten tracks were forsaken; the usual and more rapid methods of locomotion were discarded. By strange and unknown paths they proceeded to explore fresh fields and pastures new. They entered eventually into a hilly and even mountainous country in which the sparsely scattered inns and auberges were of the smallest and the devious tracks were of the narrowest, and the journey had to be taken along the edge of steep slopes, and on the saddles of sure-footed mules.

During no portion of their pleasant and exciting journey had Don Antonio de Diaz showed himself so thoroughly pleasant a companion as now. He twirled his dainty moustache with his fingers, fingers that sparkled almost as brightly as his eyes by reason of the jewelled rings he wore; he showed his white teeth and showered his smiles and scattered his jokes and witticisms all around; and piquant stories floated from his lips as musical and mirthful as the sparkling mountain brooks that babbled as they passed.

Harold Spofforth was delighted, too, to find that the further they proceeded into the heart of the country, the more profoundly his aristocratic friend and comrade was held in honour,—the lower and more reverent were the obeisances of innkeeper and muleteer, and also of the few peasants whom they met. Our young Englishman could not help expressing his pleasure at this. It argued, he said, well for the manners and customs of the Spanish peasantry, and still better for his friend the Don, that he could command such universal and profound respect.

"You see, Señor Spofforth," the Spaniard responded with a pleasant twinkle in his eye, "I am no stranger among these good people, and my race has been held in high honour in these regions from the very earliest days of Spain's existence. The noble house of Diaz," he continued proudly, "has many a noble pile to dwell in, but its true home is in the people's hearts."

"That is a noble sentiment," said the delighted Harold, "and to hear you utter it is proof enough that you deserve to come of the lineage of de Diaz, and that you are a worthy bearer of the name."

The Don smiled loftily and waved his hand as one who would put away from him all flattering remarks, and said—

"We shall presently reach the outlying portions of Don Miguel de Herrara's charming mountain home. I dare to

say that once fairly under the spell of his hospitality, your visit to Madrid will be willingly postponed awhile."

By-and-by, as they were slowly rounding the base of a tall mountain whose slopes were thickly covered by dark umbrageous pines, and at whose foot a brawling stream chafed and bickered on its course to the sea, our travellers were suddenly attacked by at least a dozen well-armed bandits. These very plainly informed them they were to consider themselves captives, and that resistance was certain to be followed by a short shrift, and, not a long rope exactly, but a swift bullet or a sharp knife.

Don Antonio's grief and vexation knew no bounds. "He would not have cared for himself," he said, "but to have led his friend and comrade into such grief and trouble was gall and wormwood to his soul."

Harold was slow to realise the awkward fact that he and his estimable comrade were really taken prisoners; and that they were at the mercy of a band of desperadoes who were as rough and unceremonious in their manners as they were fierce and sinister in their looks. They did not fail, however, to convince him that he was really held in durance; and when the English spirit in him began to assert itself somewhat strongly, prompting him to rebel against such a high-handed proceeding, he was coolly and sternly told that there were three courses open to him, any one of which he was free to choose.

The first alternative was quiet submission, in which case all would be well and he could proceed in comfort. The second course was, to be bound hand and foot and strapped firmly to the mule on which he was riding; in which case an occasional blow from the staff of the muleteer or a prick with the point of a dagger, an article which appeared to be present in sufficient plenty, would doubtless keep him from chafing in his bonds. The third course was, to be subjected to the influence of a bullet from one of their long double-barrelled rifles, in which case, of course, both he and they

would be relieved from any further trouble. It was anything but a pleasant predicament, and 'the proverbial three courses' did not offer him any great variety of choice.

On the whole, our hero—well, no, not our hero exactly, he is not made of the right kind of stuff: let us say, their English prize—elected to choose quiet submission. His noble fellow-captive warmly counselled this line of policy, and certainly he himself bore this stroke of ill fortune with wonderful coolness and self-control.

"They are a set of smugglers, I suppose," said he, "who vary their ordinary calling by doing a little business in highway robbery. No doubt we shall be able to come to terms with them. Meanwhile, let us not forget that patience is a virtue."

Passing through a long, narrow ravine, very dark and gloomy owing to the mass of foliage which from either side overspread the rough road on which they travelled, they came at length into a dense forest. Here the path became tortuous, and to Harold it appeared that they repeatedly turned upon the unbeaten way they had already traversed. A guide, however, was at the head of the odd procession, who seemed to know his business, and never paused or faltered as if in doubt.

At length, when the natural gloom of the forest was still further darkened by the shades of night, our pair of adventurers found themselves in an open glade in which was quite a large encampment. On the further side of the glen, a tall imposing rock reared high its craggy head. Its rough broad breast was covered with brambles, brushwood, scraggy shrubs and trees; and at the base of the rock were several large caverns. These were evidently used for human dwellings, or rather as a sort of barracks, with all the addenda of stores and magazines thereto belonging. Harold Spofforth was here separated from his comrade in misfortune. He was conducted into one of these spacious caves,



"If he did not look as amiable as such thoughtful hospitality deserved, he would spoil his beauty for him."—*Page* 135.

which was dimly lighted with one or two rude oil lamps. He was pointed to a couch of dry leaves which lay in the further corner, and was given to understand that as he was doubtless weary with his long ride, he had better rest his limbs awhile, and that supper would follow in due course. He received these hospitalities with a sullen though silent scowl, and not by any means with a spirit of submission.

The tawny bandit who seemed to have him in charge, and whose most noteworthy distinctions of features were two keen and almost blazing eyes, and an immense breadth of jet-black beard and whisker, cut closely so as not to be inconvenient, did not seem to relish the sullen way in which his advice was taken. Blackbeard told him with an oath, and in most mellifluous Spanish, that if he did not look as amiable as such thoughtful hospitality deserved, he would spoil his beauty for him,—at the same time he laid his hand on a formidable knife which was sheathed in the bright red scarf bound about his waist.

No sooner was Harold left alone than he uttered a passionate exclamation of anger and vexation, and flung himself upon the rude but not uncomfortable couch of leaves. Like most of his selfish and unthinking kind, this votary of pleasure thought himself very hardly used. He cursed his fate. He bemoaned his ill fortune. He inveighed against the cruel 'destiny' that had brought him there. He ought to have indicted the sin and folly which had brought him there, and have mourned over his own most discreditable course.

Silly men and women, whose voluntary misdoings bring upon themselves sore mishaps and subject them to great hardships, are always ready to bemoan their hard 'fate,' and to deplore their 'misfortunes,' when in reality it is their own misconduct that ought to be the sole subject of their thoughts and of their tears. Misery is a state and condition most frequently induced by men's

follies. 'He that breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him,' says Solomon, that greatest and wisest of all proverbial philosophers. In that case it is not the serpent, or its bite, or the sure law that sin must find its punishment, but the hedge-breaker, who must bear the blame and the shame. 'Wrong-doing hath long rueing,' says the old saw, and it is well where the rueing comes while reform is possible and repentance can bring forth fruit.

"Fools make a mock of sin, will not believe
It carries such a dagger in its sleeve ;
'How can it be,' they say, 'that such a thing,
So full of sweetness e'er should wear a sting?'
They know not that it is the very spell
Of sin, to make men laugh themselves to hell.
Look to thyself then, deal with sin no more,
Lest He that saves, against thee shut the door."

As yet, however, Harold Spofforth has got no further than to murmur angrily against 'misfortune' and bemoan his evil 'fate.'

In the course of an hour or so, Blackbeard re-appeared with a smoking dish, whose savoury fragrance was not by any means unattractive to the prisoner. His appetite, sharpened by his long ride in the mountain air, was not materially lessened by his mishap, for he did not doubt that his comrade was right as to the temporary character of their detention. And so the dish, which contained a peculiar compound of broiled fowl and vegetables with a slight dressing of oil, was eventually taken away considerably lightened of its contents. Then followed a flask of light wine, some cheese made from the milk of the goat, and after these some fruit. It was clear that Harold had no reason to complain about his prison fare.

The sullen silence in which Harold had received Blackbeard's advances, and his efforts to put matters on

a conversational footing, seemed now to have been transferred to the bandit. All the time he ministered to his prisoner he regarded him closely with those blazing black eyes of his, but spake to him never a word. If this was a *ruse* of his to unlock the tongue of the Englishman, it was cleverly done and was quite successful. When his strange attendant brought him the fruit, Harold thought fit to conciliate him by offering him a draught from the wine-flask. There was something suggestive in the eagerness with which Blackbeard complied, an eagerness that might well have led Harold to doubt whether this Spaniard, at least, was quite so soberly inclined as Spaniards, in general, get the credit for.

"Thanks, señor," said the man as he received it, and straightway engaged in what was evidently a most enjoyable occupation.

"What has become of my friend Don Antonio de Diaz?" Harold ventured to inquire.

Blackbeard regarded his prisoner with an odd grimace on his countenance, and in a peculiar tone of voice, replied—

"Your friend, señor, is at this moment engaged like yourself, in dining. It is from his table that your wine is brought. Will it please you to drink his honour's health?"

There was something so sarcastic in the question, and especially in the tone; and withal, there was such a sinister twinkle in the fellow's eye, and such a semi-chuckle in his voice, that Harold was not slow in jumping to conclusions. It dawned upon him full and clear that Don Antonio's 'friendship' had to answer for his present peril. The thought of treachery silenced him, and Blackbeard, bestowing a parting chuckle on his prisoner, left him for the night.

CHAPTER XVII.

HAROLD SPOFFORTH IS AN EYE-WITNESS OF A TERRIBLE TRAGEDY; AND SIMON HOLMES PHILOSOPHISES AFTER HIS USUAL FASHION.

"There breathed but few whose aspect might defy
The full encounter of his searching eye.
There was a laughing devil in his sneer
That raised emotions both of rage and fear;
And when his frown of hatred darkly fell,
Hope withering fled, and Mercy sighed, farewell."

Byron.

AS Harold Spofforth lay upon his couch of leaves his suspicions of foul play on the part of his friend the Spanish Don deepened into strong conviction that he had been entrapped, and that Don Antonio himself was the prime mover in the plot. After a somewhat sleepless night, and while he was partaking with a failing appetite of the breakfast which Blackbeard had brought him, Don Antonio entered the cave dressed in full bandit garb embroidered gaily, Spanish fashion, and with a swathe of red silk around his waist by way of girdle, from which a dagger and a pistol gleamed.

In his broad-brimmed, narrow-peaked hat was a bright red feather, the token of his captaincy in the band of brigands of which he was chief.

"Good morning, Señor Spofforth," said he coolly. "I

hope my little scheme for replenishing the empty pockets of my gallant comrades has not spoiled your appetite. I hope, too, that your brief sojourn among us in our mountain home will brace you after your dissipation in gay Paris. Carrambo! but you do go the pace in your hunting after pleasure! I hope you may find it here. You will find our mountain air an admirable tonic, and if we bleed your money-bags, it will be your own fault and folly if we have also to bleed you."

Here the bandit chief laid his hand on the hilt of his dagger, and the gleam of devilry in his eye gave proof enough that it was no empty threat. Harold was passionately angry and would have thrown himself unarmed upon his treacherous companion, but for the deadly scowl and the jewel-hilted dagger on which the bandit's hand was laid.

"Don Antonio," he began, but was stopped by the brigand leader.

"He does not live in this quarter, my foolish friend. He is to be found at certain seasons in the Parisian saloons which he visits when trade is bad, in search of pigeons such as you. My name is Pedro de Panza, señor. Perhaps you may have heard of me before."

The last sentence was added with a gesture and a tone which implied that the notorious outlaw was proud of his evil fame.

Harold Spofforth was now fully alive to his terrible position. He knew that no fiercer villain, no more cruel and reckless freebooter, ever steeped his soul in blood than 'Red Pedro,' whose name was a terror, and whose consummate skill and daring, and his popularity amongst the peasantry of the mountains, had enabled him hitherto to defy all the power of the government to capture or defeat him.

The young Englishman exhibited his despair in an

expression between a curse and a groan, and flung himself on the rude bed as one who had only to submit and die.

"Nay, nay," said Red Pedro, proud to see the effect his dread name could produce. "I said, just now, that your stay here might be brief. It rests with yourself as to whether you will set your foot on British ground again. I want gold; I don't want your life."

"You have it," said Harold. "All I took to Paris. and all I got from my father while I was there, fell into your hands. I have no more."

"True enough, my merry comrade," replied the bandit, "but there's plenty more in the coffers of Aspen Towers. And if not, there are plenty of broad acres around the old pile, and plenty of obliging sons of Abraham who can find the gold. Gold! red gold!" he cried, dipping his hands as if he were scooping the glittering coin into his palm. "And gold I'll have, Sir Englishman, or"— here he uttered a fearful oath—"a well aimed bullet or a deft dagger-stroke will settle your little account, with no need for a notary to write it off. Hark you, Señor Spofforth, your ransom is ten thousand pounds. When that amount comes hither, you are free to go."

"Shoot your bullet, or draw your dagger, then!" said Harold, "and be quick about it. My cursed follies have already put a crushing weight on Aspen Chase. Not one half that sum can possibly be raised," and so saying, the fatuous prodigal, now drinking of the bitter cup himself had mixed, covered his face with his hands and felt that he should die.

"Oh no," said Red Pedro coolly. "The only son and heir of the noble house of Spofforth estimates himself too cheaply. We can but try. You will write our demand. I will see that it reaches the hand of your honourable parent. If the first application is not successful, we will make a

second, with one of your ears to bear it company. Should that fail, we will make a third, and the other ear will be sent to give force to our request. Pursuing that line of application by degrees and with quiet patience, I shall secure the sum I stipulate for, or your affectionate relatives will have the satisfaction of welcoming your return — by instalments!"

Stung almost to madness by the cruel and heartless taunts of the bandit chief, Harold rose and rushed upon him with frantic wrath. At that instant a strong hand clutched him by the shoulder, flung him roughly backward on his couch of leaves, and brawny Blackbeard knelt beside him with one knee upon his chest.

"Let Señor Spofforth rise," said the Captain, quite blandly and in altogether unruffled tones. "He will get over all that by-and-by, as children do with the measles. Bring him this way."

Blackbeard conducted the young Englishman to the door of the cave in which he had lain a prisoner, to a position from which he had a full view of the broad green glade which was the centre of the bandit's camp. Red Pedro took a small ivory whistle from his breast, and blew it so loudly that its shrill echoes were heard from every side. In a moment every cave was emptied, for the entire band of brigands appeared, and with a sort of military precision marched into the centre of the glade. Three of them were armed with long barrelled rifles, and these three took a few steps forward from the rest and stood at attention as if waiting orders.

The ivory whistle was blown a second time. Then two of the brigands were seen to cross the glade from another quarter, having between them a prisoner dressed in ordinary clothing, looking sadly wan and weary and dejected. He seemed to be an Englishman, and was evidently a man of breeding and position. Harold judged him to be about

sixty years of age, but it was mainly his white hair that had guided him to that conclusion, and the harsh treatment he had received, and the consciousness of his impending fate might well have turned the darkest locks as white as wool.

The men placed their prisoner several paces distant from the armed three, and then joined their comrades in the ranks.

"You don't know him?" said Red Pedro, turning to Harold, as calmly as though he were about to invite them both to breakfast.

Harold was too much startled and distressed to make any reply.

"Señor Spofforth," continued the brigand chief, "we have had the pleasure of extending our hospitality to this worthy gentleman for six months. Every reasonable method has been employed to obtain his ransom, which was only fixed at a paltry thousand or so. It has not come to hand. We have exercised a patience and forbearance which must redound to our credit and our reputation for those excellent virtues. The time of grace is ended this morning. The hour," said he, taking out a large gold chronometer, "is ten, exactly."

Here Red Pedro lifted his hand, and the three armed men raised their rifles and took aim. A third time the merciless chief blew his shrill whistle. The crack of three rifles blended in one dread report, and the hapless prisoner had fallen face downwards on the crimsoned sward with three bullets in his heart!

"There, Señor Spofforth," said the brigand chief, softly and smilingly, "you can now return to your quarters. You will write our demand, and the little episode which you have just witnessed will probably enable you to word your communication with due effect so that it may not be misunderstood."

Red Pedro bowed low, smiling blandly and loftily, and

retired, leaving Harold to chew the bitter cud of reflection, conscious that if his ransom was not forthcoming, he too, in turn, would fall face forward before the rifles of the three executioners, like the hapless victim who had just been wickedly done to death.

Now, he noted that Blackbeard was more than ever on the watch, that he was well-armed, and that there was all but an absolute impossibility of escape. Slowly the hours of that weary day passed by. Writing materials were provided for him, but he could not bring himself to frame the letter on which his life depended. He was now brought face to face with his own wasted life, and for the first time he realised what a dark and shameful page it was. He was now face to face with death; and for the first time he thought of his utter unfitness to appear at the Great Assize. He conjured up the picture of his grieved and injured father; called back the image of his dead mother, and remembered how he had spurned her counsel and set at naught her tears. He saw the face, the beautiful and winsome face of his sister Ethel, and thought upon her true affection for himself. Then it was that shame, conviction, and remorseful agony came upon him like a flood. Then it was that his better nature asserted itself and made him half deranged by the lashes which his guilty conscience gave him. Through the long, dark, awful night hours, thorny thoughts, and conscience stings, and awful apprehensions drove the sleep from his eyes, and slumber from his eyelids; and if ever mortal man had a raging hell within his soul, that man was Harold Spofforth, tossing and groaning in mental torture on his couch of leaves.

Of one thing, however, he was certain. He would not write the letter. His own foolish vanity had led him to boast of the wealth of his father and of the large fortune to which he himself was sure to succeed, and hence the

ransom asked for him was fearfully large, more than his father could have paid had his childish boasts been true. But he knew how his own career of reckless extravagance had depleted his father's purse, and drained his resources, and he said to himself, "It can never be, shall never be. It is better for me to die." All that was good in him was just then struggling to get uppermost, and when the grey light of the morning began to show through the cracks in the rough door that held him prisoner, he arose from his bed resolved to refuse the bidding of the brigand chief and die. There for the present we must leave him leave him with that awful burden on his soul, leave him with that most dreadful of all guests to keep him company, an aroused and guilty conscience.

> "Not all the tortures which the poets feign,
> Can match the fierce, unutterable pain
> He feels who, day and night, devoid of rest,
> Carries his own accuser in his breast."

Harold Spofforth, like many another of Madame Pleasure's hoodwinked dupes, had had a long smooth course of self-indulgence, 'dallying daily with a false delight,' but now the mask was lifted and the demon features behind the false face were scowling on him. The cup which moveth itself aright and which had invited his lips to its beaded brim, revealed the coiled serpent that lay hid beneath the enticing draught; and the young prodigal awoke to the tremendous truth that—

> "Though the mills of God grind slowly,
> Yet they grind exceeding small;
> Though with patience He stands waiting,
> With exactness grinds He all."

And yet his sweet sister Ethel was offering daily prayer for Harold Spofforth; she and the godly carpenter had

entered into a holy league, and thrice a day their prayers rose to heaven, that the wanderer, far as he had wandered, might be brought back again to home and God. For this, as they both believed, the maiden had been raised from a bed of death. And at the very time that Harold was writhing in mental agony on the floor of the brigand's cave, Ethel was girding herself for her unknown task. She goes forth in 'this her might,' the might of faith, and prayer, and purity, to find the wanderer, and to bring him back to peaceful Aspendale!

At times the courage of the fair girl would droop as the time came near that her bodily strength might permit her to depart, but her purpose never staggered for an hour. On such occasions she would seek the carpenter's cottage, or induce Nancy to fetch him to the Towers, in order that she might catch an inspiration from his noble philosophy and his lofty faith.

"Sometimes I feel," said Ethel to him one day, "as if so great a thing cannot be done by a poor weak girl like me. I say to myself, It's impossible. And then, do you know, Simon, it seems as though I've been deceiving myself all through, and that I must give it up and let it alone."

"To be sure it does, Miss," Simon answered with a smile. "As soon as ivver a bod closes its wings it drops. Nowt so nat'ral. Impossible's a wod that poor mortals ha' offen to use when its aboot something that *they're* consarned in But wi' God it's different. 'With God all things are possible' We must get hod o' that an' keep it. If we don't, things 'll turn oot as we fear an' not as we hope. There was old Mrs. Johnson that used to live just behint Coo-slip Hill, on' t' other side o' the valley, she used to say that she wished the hill was ta'en away, then she could see all t' village o' Thorpe Aspen. So she read in her Bible that prayer an' faith could remove moontains: an' she went to work and prayed that God would remove Coo-slip Hill,

because she had faith to beleeave it. In the mornin' when she got up an' lifted t' window curtain, there it was standin as stiff as ivver! So she calls oot to her husband, 'John, it's just as I expected, Coo slip Hill is standin' yet.' Noo, Miss Ethel, you are asking for something right an' reasonable an' a good deal better then that. But if yo' get to sayin' 'It's impossible!' why it'll be 'just as you expected,' you knoa, an' you've nowt to wonder at. There was a great man once 'at said that wi' the lever he could move the wo'ld if he could only finnd a spot to set it. You hev the lever; it's faith; an' you hev a spot to set it; it's the rock o' God's Omnipotence; an' you don't want to move a wo'ld, only a blunderin' lad that you want to move a bit nearer to God an' Thorpe Aspen. What do you think yourself, noo? Is it over much to hope for?"

"Oh no, no, Simon! It's only my poor foolish fears that speak. Thank you, dear friend. Harold will come home, and that will be 'Just as I expected,'" and the sweet maiden laughed at her own fears.

"That's right, Miss Ethel. That's right. Leave it all to God. When I'm makin' a cart wheel, it would be a queer thing if one o' the spokes could say, 'I can't get into that hole i' the naff. It's impossible.' If it did I should just point t' end on it a bit to give it a start, an' then I should tak' the great hammer an' in it would go like all t' rest on 'em. You an' me are nowt but tools an' instruments, an' it would be odd if the Almighty couldn't manage us and employ us to do His work as well as I can manage a cart wheel. Let us do His will an' trust Him, an' lean on Him, an' lean hard.

'Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
An' looks to that alone,
Laughs at impossibilities
An' cries, It shall be done!'"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BOADICEA FOUNDERS ON THE HIGH SEAS, AND ALFRED ATHELING TAKES CHARGE OF A GREAT TREASURE.

"There is peril on the sea
When the storm is high. Ah, then,
The greatest peril that can be
Is the wickedness of men
That sent a rotten bark to be
Swallowed by the hungry sea."

Fallowfield.

ALFRED ATHELING was fairly out on the high seas bound for the West. He felt that he could breathe more freely now than he had ever done since he escaped from the grip of Police Constable Tugwell, and especially since he came plump against that officer in the doorway of the City Bank.

There came to him now something of the buoyancy which is the natural and rightful heritage of youth, but which he had sold for those unwholesome viands concocted by Pleasure's deceptive hand. He was already planning his course of action. He saw himself safely landed. He saw in the not distant future competence and character coming at the call of his ready and diligent pen. He would write to Aspen

Garth and let them know this,—that he meant to live a nobler and a worthier life. If only his conscience would be quiet; if only he could wipe out with the sponge of oblivion all his evil past! But we cannot so easily dispose of our yesterdays, and ever the way upward from wrong to right is steep and trying and rough for the traveller's feet. Still, if it is boldly attempted and wisely dared, the brave though tired toiler will win the breezy table-lands and sun-lit heights of Honour and of Truth. But neither can we carve out the sure course and bent of our to-morrows, and Alfred Atheling must go where Providence directs his steps. We will not forget that he is held to Aspen Garth with golden links, that 'golden chain' of which the poet speaks, by which earth is bound around the feet of God.

The ship in which the young man sailed, a sailing ship, chosen for economy and for the smaller risk of observation and discovery, was called the *Boadicea*. It had only one thing in common with its brave and queenly British namesake—it was destined to come to a sad and untimely end. It was old and unseaworthy, and like many other craft sent out to sea with a reckless disregard of peril, it was far more likely to reach the bottom of the Atlantic than to win the harbour of New York.

Alfred's observant eye soon took in the unpleasant fact, that he and his comrades in the *Boadicea* were floating in a 'match-box,' and that stress of weather was likely enough to end their voyage in mid-ocean, so frail were the planks between them and death. Captain Lanyon, a rugged and stalwart old salt with grizzled hair and honest face, had himself been deceived as to the sea-going qualities of his vessel, and he had not been at sea a week before he rued the day that ever he set foot on board. His wrath and anxiety were all the greater

that he had on board a fair sweet girl whom he loved as his own soul.

"My lassie isn't mine, according to law," the skipper had told Alfred, "but according to love there's no two in the world that have a better right to each other. Is there, Inez?"

One flash of his 'lassie's' dark eyes gave answer enough to that question.

"I found her on the sea," continued the captain, in explanation of the relation between him and Inez. "She was fastened to a small raft on which there was also an old negro. He was so far exhausted with hardship, exposure, and privation, that he died a few hours after he was brought on board. I asked him the name of the child and where she came from. His answers were very indistinct, for his mind was wandering. I managed to hear him say—

"Missee is Massa's darlin'. On de ole plantation, Massa say, 'Cuffee, tek' care ob Inez.' Tell him—Cuffee did—till—till—" and then the poor faithful fellow died and carried his secret to his grave among the sand and sea shells many a fathom deep.

"And so the little Inez was left alone, a waif, without any link to bind her to any human being under heaven," continued the captain. "She could not talk plain, and what she could say was in some foreign lingo that nobody could understand. I somehow took her to my heart at once, and now for nearly a dozen years I've nourished her and cherished her, and verily I've had my reward."

His goodness had been well repaid, for the charming lassie, little more than a child in size and movements, loved him, honoured him, half-worshipped him with all the warmth of the southern climate in which she was born; for from the south her brilliant orbs, her 'sloe black een,' her raven tresses and her dusky features, had most assuredly come.

Since the death of her 'mother,' as she had called the captain's wife, little Inez had been doubly dear to Captain Lanyon, and was indeed the apple of his eye. From the beginning of this voyage, the girl had 'taken to' Alfred Atheling, and Alfred had heartily responded, glad enough of some employment and companionship that might help to drive dull care away.

The artless girl soon won upon his sympathies. He put forth all his skill to interest and amuse her, and so the early days of their slow voyage passed pleasantly enough. Then came a serious change in the weather; and the captain and his passenger began to fear whether the cranky *Boadicea* would ever outride a storm.

One evening Alfred and Inez were together in the cabin. Alfred was drawing clever comic caricatures with his pen, eliciting ripples of laughter from his young companion. The ship was rolling and tossing heavily, and as Alfred thought, was labouring and complaining beneath the strain. The light-hearted maiden had no thought of peril, but Alfred became seriously anxious and afraid. He was just about to go on deck to seek some assurance from the skipper, when Captain Lanyon himself came down the companion-ladder with an alarmed look upon his face.

"Mr. Ravensworth," said he, for we must not forget that Alfred had assumed that name, "I want a word with you."

The look on his face and the tone of his voice made Alfred's heart leap into his throat.

"I'll be back in a moment, Inez," he said, and went forth to hold serious talk with the skipper outside the cabin door.

"We are going to see the last of this confounded old tub," said Captain Lanyon; "God grant she may not see the last of us. She has sprung a leak, and by the way the water is rising in the hold, I don't believe the pumps can keep it under."

"What shall we do with Inez?" inquired Alfred, his first care being for the maiden whose merry ripples of laughter were still sounding in his ears.

"That's what I want to say," said the skipper, as well as he could, for a certain choking sensation that sadly interfered with clear articulation. "We shall have to take to the boats, I fear, and it is as well to be prepared. While I am seeing to that, will you make my darling your special care. Let her get her warmest clothing. Poor child! It will be hard lines for her. Help her so far as you can to prepare for roughing it. I shall have the boats well provisioned, so that if the worst comes to the worst, we can lower them at a minute's notice. Then we can only commit ourselves into the hands of God."

"To the hands of God!" thought Alfred, as he returned to the cabin. He felt as though those unclean hands of his, that sin-soiled heart, that wasted life of his, formed but a poor warrant for hoping that His hands would care for him. He tried to pray, but it did not seem as though he could. Then he thought of the dear little maiden in the cabin and the dreadful peril that menaced her.

"I can pray for her," he said. "God, in mercy spare the child!" He felt the better for it, and well he might, for as the Hebrew proverb has it, "Who prays for another petitions for himself."

Inez had intuitively divined the presence of danger; and when Alfred informed her that they might have to take to the boats, the little maiden neither paled nor trembled. She simply clasped her hands and prayed. "God save dear father and you," she said, quite self-forgettingly; and then set about making her preparations with a quiet calm which touched Alfred to the soul.

She was then persuaded to try to sleep. Still quiet and self-contained, she repeated her nightly prayer. Then lying down on a large rug which Alfred had disposed for her in

a corner of the cabin, she slumbered as only they can slumber on the brink of peril who are conscious of a Heavenly Father's care. Alfred softly stole away so as not to disturb her slumbers, and went on deck. His alarm deepened as he noted the roaring of the wind, and the growing violence of the sea. He could hardly keep his feet on the reeling deck, and the noise of the creaking timbers fell heavy on his heart. He was met by the captain, who spoke to him in slow and serious undertones.

"I am afraid the crew is not to be depended on," said he, "there's a spirit of disaffection which threatens to be serious. You will do your best for Inez?"

"At the risk, and if needs be, the cost of my life," said Alfred, grasping the captain's hand, and looking all he felt.

"Then take this pistol," responded Captain Lanyon. "You will most likely have to use it. Keep your eye on me."

The men continued to labour at the pumps, and every effort was made to keep the cranky craft afloat, but there was a dead silence among the men, and they passed telegraphic signs to each other that boded mischief. So the long, long hours of the tedious night wore on, and Alfred, who had taken a long turn at the pumps, was wearily watching for the dawn. When the grey light began to show, Alfred's heart failed him at the sight of the still lowering sky and the still angry billows that beat heavily against the trembling ship.

"The water gains on us," said one of the sailors, emphasising the remark with a coarse expression. "It's all up with the crazy old tub, an' it's no use pumping any more," and he folded his arms as one who should say, 'I shall pump no more.' As Alfred looked on the faces of the men, some of them, at any rate, he read the fact that the peril from a lawless and reckless crew might be greater than even from a raging sea and a foundering ship.

"I'll pump no more!" said another sailor with a fearful oath, following the example of his comrade, and releasing his hold upon the handle; and in this act of open disobedience he was followed by the rest.

"Lower the boats!" cried Captain Lanyon, coming aft with a view to direct operations. "Lower the boats, my men. We may save ourselves, the ship will have to go."

"Avast there, skipper!" said a brawny fellow with a fierce, defiant look upon his face. "That's a job—that's a job that needs primin' for. Before we lower the boats, we'll raise the rum-cask," and so saying, he strode towards the gangway, bent on getting at the ardent spirits, which would have ruined all.

Captain Lanyon drew a pistol from his breast, leaped in front of the companion-ladder, and stood before the ringleader with his pistol cocked and ready.

"Back, man!" he exclaimed, "or you will fall with a bullet in your brain. I've stove in the casks, for I mean to save your lives!"

"You lie!" said the man with a horrid oath, and rushed forward.

In an instant there was a flash and a loud report, and a dead man lying at the captain's feet.

"If you do your duty, lads," cried the captain sternly, "we may all be saved. If not, who is the next fool to rush upon his fate?"

Even in that awful and exciting moment, Alfred could not but admire the firm mien and steadfast courage of Captain Lanyon. Kindly and gentle as woman was the captain usually, but now he confronted the gang of mutineers with an unflinching eye. Alfred had sprung to his side with his pistol ready for action, as the skipper might direct.

"Joe Hewitt!" called out the captain to an old and trusted tar, "is your pistol ready?"

"Ay, ay, sir," said the man, and he, too, ranged himself by the captain's side.

"Lower the boats!" said the skipper sternly.

Sullenly, slowly, silently the men obeyed. The mutinous spirit was cowed if not broken. Alfred fetched up the trembling Inez, who had heard the pistol crack and feared the worst. He saw her carefully placed in the foremost boat. Joe Hewitt followed her and Will Trounce.

"Lower the other boat!" thundered the captain.

The men hung back, and looked one on the other as if in search of a spokesman.

"No boat can live in this sea," said one, "we'd rather find a rum barrel an' go to Davy Jones comfortable."

"The leak's stopped, captain," said another. "She'll float for long enough yet."

"The ship'll go down in an hour," said Captain Lanyon. "She's settling now. Scott and Davison, let go them ropes. I'm to be the last man on board this ship, and I will if I have to shoot every rebel of you all."

There was none so daring as to risk the crooking of that firm finger. The boat was lowered, the men descended one by one until the deck was cleared. Stores of various kinds had been previously stowed away to meet this emergency. Then Alfred Atheling leaped into the first boat and was followed by the captain.

"Push off!" he cried.

They pulled with a will. A few vigorous strokes took them out of all peril of being sucked down by the sinking ship. Then the *Boadicea* dipped stern foremost into the sea, and in a few moments the swirling waters hissed and boiled and eddied where the rotten craft had gone down, a victim to the shameless and murderous cupidity of the villanous owners who had sent her out to sea, and put in peril a score of human lives. It will be an evil hour for all their tribe when God maketh inquisition for blood!

CHAPTER XIX.

ALFRED ATHELING AND HIS COMRADES ARE CAST ADRIFT; AND THE MAIDEN INEZ SINGS HER EVENSONG AT SEA.

"The night is calm and silent,
And still as still can be,
And the stars come out to listen
To the music of the sea.
They gather and gather and gather,
Until they crowd the sky,
And listen in breathless silence
To the solemn litany."

Longfellow.

THE two boats containing the crew of the hapless *Boadicea* were each provided with a compass as well as with stores: and the steersmen were directed to keep as far as possible in the track of the liners in hope of rescue by some passing ship. Nothing could surpass the calm trustfulness of the gentle Inez, as she sat in the stern of the boat, warmly wrapped amid an outer covering of tarpaulin which kept her from being drenched by the spray of the angry waves. Alfred made her smile by the buoyant and careless way in which he expressed his opinion that that region swarmed with ships like hansoms in a London street. The old skipper looked his gratitude, and said—

"Inez, dear lassie, knows that we are in the hands of our Heavenly Father."

Good keeping that, either on land or sea.

As the dim dawn gave way to morning and a clearer light, the wind lowered a little, and the long ground swell of the Atlantic resumed its normal and stately flow. It was winter time, however, and Alfred and the captain feared lest Inez should not have powers of endurance equal to the continued strain. During the day the two boats kept well together, and the men in the other boat seemed willing enough now to trust themselves to the superior guidance of Captain Lanyon, who had so far saved them from a cruel fate.

Measured rations were now served out both of food and water, as there seemed every probability of a long and trying probation before a chance of rescue came. Already the heart of Alfred was sick with fear, for the sake of the child who had gained such a hold upon him, that it might never come at all. Inez, who was resolved not to fail in the hour of need, but to cheer her father in this time of peril, kept calling attention, now to a break in the dun sky, and now to the lessening crests of the foaming waves. Then she would start some simple strain of sacred song such as she and her father had sung together many a time in their pleasant cottage in the little Kentish town of Deal.

At such times as these, Alfred Atheling would fancy that he caught an echo of his sister Clara's voice, and fly in thought over miles of sea, to the sacred circle gathered round the beechwood fire at Aspen Garth, and his whole soul would be melted into penitence and grief. A silent tear would find its way down Captain Lanyon's rugged cheek, and Joe Hewitt and Will Trounce were puzzled to account for a certain dimness of the eyes and an odd sensation in the throat.

Still the hours, leaden hours, passed slowly by. Morning gave way to noon; noon slowly gave place to evening; and still naught met their watchful gaze but miles and miles of sea. At dusk a solemn stillness seemed to hold them captive.

> "Now deep in ocean sank the lamp of light,
> And drew behind the cloudy vale of night."

The stars peeped forth, for the cloudy sky had broken into patches, and our little band of voyagers knew that they were doomed to float upon the wide waste of waters through the hours of dark, unfriended, except by Heaven, until the dawn appeared.

"I love to watch the stars," said Inez. "Do you know, they always seem to me as if they were the lamps of the angels keeping watch, and held up by them so that they may the better look down into the night: or are they the eyes of the angels themselves? they look so sweet and kind."

"There's a better Light than theirs looking down on us, my darling," said the skipper, looking upward first, and then into the dark orbs of Inez, "and that is the Eye of the good God that's over all."

Alfred Atheling looked and listened. At first he felt as though he dared not look up, lest from the Holy Place that Eye should look through him then and there. And yet at that moment there was that within him on which that Eye doth always look with delight, a softened penitence, a silent hunger after goodness, a deep craving for a higher and a nobler life. And still the stars shone down, softly and sweetly, like the benediction which Heaven smiles down on the 'one sinner that repenteth.'

"I don't somehow feel as though this'll be such a long night," said Joe Hewitt, as though nights had a way of lengthening or shortening their duration as the humour took them.

The poor fellow thought that he must say something to make the advancing dark less gloomy to the maiden whose cheery patience had so touched his heart.

"Help always comes wi' daylight," he continued, "doesn't it, Will Trounce?"

"Ay, ay, mate, to be sure it does," said his comrade, not to be behind hand. "There's mostly ships about, hereaways;" and here the speaker waved his arm as though he quite expected a full half dozen of them to show their dark hulls close by, within the next half hour or so.

"I can't tell how it is," replied Joe, determined to keep the ball rolling, "that we ain't seen a goodish few of 'em already. I guess they've been wind-bound somewhere, so they'll come in a reg'lar fleet direc'ly, but we shan't want to get aboard more than one of 'em, Miss, shall we? Shall we, Will Trounce?"

"Why, not at one an' the same time," said Will gravely, "but we can change about, if so be as the humour takes us i' that way."

"This 'ere wind's a steady, well-behaved, dependable sou'-wester," said Joe, returning to the charge. "An' it's bound to bring 'em by-an'-by. Cos why? Why, you see they'll ha' confidence in it, Miss. It makes an amazin' difference when you've a wind that you can depend on. It whistles merrily through the shrouds as if it said, 'You can depend on me. I'm not none o' your choppin' an' changing gustoes.'"

"I'll tell you what, mate, we'll keep a sharp look-out while the stars are shinin'. Won't we, Will Trounce?"

"Ay, that we will," said Will, "I've gotten a pair of eyes just like a cat's. They're pretty nigh as useful i' the dark as i' the daylight; and a nose! bless me! I've a nose that can smell the tar of a full-rigged bark well nigh half a mile off." Here Will gave a succession of sniffs as if he felt half sure there was something of that sort in the air.

Inez smiled her gratitude. She knew that the two honest tars had a kindly meaning, and that they were unblushingly drawing the long bow in order to cheer her and make her lot the lighter. And all the while the chill wind moaned and sighed; and the monotonous waves washed and plashed by the boat's side, and the darkness deepened, and the placid stars shone down.

"I think I can sleep now," said Inez, as the night thickened and the breeze blew eerily around her. Alfred arranged her cushions into a sort of couch, and wrapped her thoroughly with all the warm materials at hand. Then he completely invested her in a tarpaulin coverlet, and wished her playfully, 'Good night.'

"Not just yet, Mr Ravensworth," said she. "Father dear, come and sit by me a little."

Captain Lanyon instantly obeyed and took his seat by her side.

"Now put your hand inside my counterpane, Daddie dear, and take hold of my hand."

It was a warm grip, the telegram of a warmer heart, in which the fingers of Inez were now lying.

"Now," said she, "I am going to sing our evening hymn, Daddie, and you'll say 'Amen,' as you always do."

Surely that charming evensong of Lyte's never sounded so sweetly either on land or sea, as on that night when the pure-minded maiden sang it, as she lay in her frail skiff amid the billows, and sent the holy message floating through the darkness up to the Throne that is set above the stars.

"Abide with me, fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide:
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, it's glories pass away;

Change and decay on all around I see;
Oh Thou who changest not, abide with me.

I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, oh abide with me!

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless,
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness.
Where is Death's sting? where, Grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes,
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies:
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me."

When the song was finished, every cheek of the little band of castaways was wet with tears. Every heart felt the divine influence of that 'sweet hour of prayer.' Every tongue faltered a low 'Amen.' It seemed to one and all as if their little bark was girdled by an angel band; as if they were safe, because they had on board a ward of Heaven. They felt that in such an atmosphere of faith and prayer,

'Though man is distant, yet God is near.'

The effect upon Alfred Atheling cannot be told, because it could not be measured. Had it been possible at that moment for him to step on shore, no fear, no hindrance could have kept him from hasting to the feet of his silver-haired mother and sobbing his confession by her knee.

Inez slept long and soundly. The men were silent, taking naps in turn. Now and then a quiet whisper was exchanged, else the only sounds were the steady monotone of the wind and the plash of the waters as the wave crests broke around the boat. And all the while the holy stars kept watch until the breaking of the day.

Early in the morning. Will Trounce's eyes lighted on a distant sail. At once an oar was erected, and a red shawl belonging to Inez was soon waving in the wind. There was some eager speculation as to whether it was coming nearer. That question was soon solved, alas, for as the light increased, the speck became less and less, until it vanished quite away. The captain heaved a sigh of disappointment. A heavy weight fell like a load on Alfred's heart. Will Trounce, however, was equal to the occasion.

"We mostly finds," he said, "that when you wants the right ship, two or three wrong 'uns 'pears to come your way first. It's only nat'ral. But they've begun coming, an' they're sure to keep on at it, Miss."

Will Trounce delivered this judgment, and uttered this hopeful prophecy, with as much confidence as if he had had a large experience in the castaway line of business, and had been astray at sea in an open boat once or twice a year.

"It's all right, Will," said Inez, "God willing, the right one will be coming by-and-by. Now I want some breakfast. Sea breezes sharpen the appetite, you know."

I am afraid, however, that it was the turn of Inez now to draw the long bow. Judging by the little use she made of her morning rations, her appetite was shy, and the sea breeze could not make it come at call.

The other boat had been parted from them in the night, and even the keenness of Will Trounce's vision was insufficient to descry it. Now they felt themselves to be more than ever alone. Their efforts to keep together had helped to break the awful monotony of their sad experience. So they drifted on and on through the slow hours of another weary day, with nothing above them but a leaden winter sky, and nothing around them but the void, grey winter sea.

Joe Hewitt and Will Trounce made brave efforts to

keep up a conversation between themselves, such as should insinuate into the mind of Inez the sure and certain hope of an almost immediate deliverance, but they felt that their task was hard. Said Joe Hewitt—

"I don't know as ever I was on board bark or boat at sea so long as this without meetin' with a ship o' some sort, either homeward bound or outward bound. That brings me to this conclusion : that seeing as how they've been so long without bein' seen, it stands to reason that it can't be much longer, unless there's a strike among 'em, or old Van Tromp's risen from his grave an' swept the seas of 'em, as he threatened to do with the British fleet. That's logic, isn't it, Will Trounce?"

"That's it, messmate, exactly," said Will. "Unless all the ports i' the world ha' shut up shop an' retired from seafaring business, there's bound to be some ships in this latitude before sun-down. Keep a sharp look-out, Joe."

Both the honest tars felt, however, that their well-meant attempts fell flat and failed in their object, and for the sake of the gentle Inez their hearts were sore. Every hour the heart of Captain Lanyon grew more sad and heavy. Every hour the soul of Alfred Atheling grew more bold in earnest and unsyllabled prayer on behalf of the patient and now much-suffering maiden at his side. Every hour the two rough but tender-hearted sailors glanced at each other with ominous faces, the while they exchanged hopeful comments on the situation ; and every hour Inez was growing more quiet, more chill, more slumberous, although she nobly strove to rouse herself to converse and even to sing in order to relieve the tension felt on her account by her companions in distress.

Noon passed, the day declined. Far in the west the sun lay on a dense bank of clouds, its disc a coppery red, and all the sky around it of a dull, brick-coloured hue that portended a night of darkness and of storm. It seemed

certain now that another sad, slow, fearful night must be spent alone upon the awful deep. Alfred Atheling thought upon the words in Genesis, attaching to them a sad, sad meaning, "And the evening and the morning were the second day."



CHAPTER XX.

JOSS RECOGNISES AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE; AND EPHRAIM HARTGOLD HAPS ON TREASURE TROVE.

"Expectation whirls me round,
The imaginary relish is so sweet
That it enchants my sense."

Shakespeare.

WHILE Harold Spofforth lay in the brigands' cave, the hopeless prisoner of Red Pedro; and while Alfred Atheling drifts, a helpless castaway on the wide Atlantic; and while Ethel Spofforth is making definite preparations to pursue her quest, Robert Atheling is vainly searching for his absent brother, searching with a weary heart, and but for his faith in God, a drooping and ever-lessening hope. He succeeded in ferreting out many of Alfred's old acquaintances, in tracking out most of his usual resorts, and had happed at last on the chambers in the side street off the Strand, where Alfred received the visit of Policeman Tugwell, and from which he had fled into that obscurity, in which, so far as Robert was concerned, he still remained. Here the clue was lost. The landlady was not at home when Robert called, but Harriet the maid was still there, and was willing enough to tell him all she knew.

According to her showing, Mr. Atheling was a very nice young man indeed: very kind and generous, had often given her a ribbon for her cap, or an extra half-crown for little services she had rendered. He was a "bit wildish, perhaps, as the sayin' is," but she never saw or heard anything that "didn't become the gentleman." She detailed to her anxious hearer all the circumstances of the policeman's visit, told him how the "Bobby was catched like a rat in a trap," and described, with many a laugh, how Alfred had upset her on the landing in his hasty exit; and after informing him that neither she nor her mistress had "set eyes on him since," expressed a very cordial hope and belief that he had "given them the go-by," and that he was "over the hills and far away."

At length Robert Atheling had the good fortune to come across Mr. Cecil Osborn, the young gentleman whom we last saw 'in difficulties,' seeking to elude his financial enemies by courting the seclusion of the vicinity of the Victoria Park. That 'friend' of the absent one ventured his opinion that he was still hiding somewhere in that Eastern and plebeian region. It was not much of a clue, but still it was worth following. Indeed there was no filament of possibility, however fine, that Robert would have rejected, so bent was he on the honest and earnest prosecution of his enterprise. Having found his way to the locality indicated, he resolved to take up temporary quarters there. Nothing was more natural than that he should enter a coffee-house to make inquiries after decent lodgings and possibly to find them in the eating-house itself. Here he did find what he sought, and abode there a few days. But all this was of but little avail. It was indeed a shadowy hope that he should hit upon the young exile in his wanderings through the streets. Such a search, in the matter of probability, quite threw into the shade the proverbial task of 'finding a needle in a bottle of hay.'

In this respect fate, or rather Providence, was kinder to him than he knew.

It was not surprising that he should have happed upon the restaurant most favoured by Ned Saltmer, and it was less surprising that, as he often sat there drinking his coffee and planning new schemes, he and that worthy artisan should meet under the same roof. Now with Robert was the ever faithful and intelligent Joss. The collie seemed to be losing much of his frisky spirit under the wear and tear of London life, and no wonder. It is enough to depress and dispirit men of the most buoyant temperament, and it is not at all astonishing that a dog, with a keen appreciation of the clear and quiet air of Aspendale, should droop beneath the dreary atmosphere of damp and smoky London town. Joss, moreover, could read as clearly as could be, that Robert himself was anxious and ill at ease, and both ears and tail drooped, limp and flaccid, in sympathy with his master's disappointment and distress.

> 'With eye upraised, his master's looks to scan
> The joy, the solace, and the aid of man,'

poor Joss felt that he was failing in his mission, and accordingly was very considerably down in the dumps.

But Joss's memory was as clear and strong as ever. He had received many a morsel at Ned's hand, when that honest carpenter was in Simon Holmes' employ. He had come to know the customary dinner hour, and had paid his visits with almost unerring regularity. Ned, like all other good and honest men, was fond of dumb animals, and had treated Joss with peculiar favour. So, having eaten salt with him, as the Arabs say, Joss counted him a friend for life. He recognised the bluff artisan instantly, and barked a kindly "how d'ye do," placing his forepaws the while upon his knee, and wagging his tail as though grateful to fortune, that it had found at last something that

was worth wagging for. The recognition was not mutual, though, true to himself, Ned gave the dog a kindly pat or two. Robert Atheling fixed his eyes on the collie's new-found friend.

"Excuse me," said he, "my dog seems to know you, and strange to say, I seem to be familiar with your face. Didn't you use to work for Simon Holmes, at Thorpe Aspen?"

"Nowt so sure," said Ned, who instantly remembered both the owner and his dog. "I helped to put a new roof on your barn, Mr. Atheling, and to put up a new shed in your paddock. But I shouldn't ha' thowt that you would ha' remembered me. Well, this *is* rich!" said he, as a thought suddenly came into his mind, and slapping his knee in his excitement. "Why it was in this here very house, not so long since, that I met your bro—"

Here Ned's remark came to a sudden and untimely end. It dawned on him that he might be doing Alfred an ill turn. But he could not call back what he had already said; and as for turning Robert off on a wrong scent, plain straightforward Ned had not the art to do it. 'I give him joy that's awkward at a lie,' says the poet Young; and though Ned was nimble enough at his trade, he would have sorely bungled at a falsehood, not being 'practised to deceive.' He simply sat staring at Robert with his mouth open and said nothing.

"My brother Alfred?" cried Robert, starting from his seat. Then crossing the floor, he laid his hand on Ned's shoulder, and said with a tremulous earnestness not to be mistaken—

"For God's sake, man! tell me all you know."

There was a few moments' pause. Ned was reading his companion's heart: not by any means a difficult task, for there it was, in his eyes, both eloquent with a brother's love.

"I hope he won't get into trouble if you should chance on him," said Ned questioningly.

"No, I think not, now; I hope and believe not. I want to save him *from* trouble. I want to save his mother's life. She is breaking her heart over him." His voice faltered as he spoke.

Ned's heart was very tender, and Robert Atheling's anxious and weary tone cut right into the middle of it.

"I don't know where he *is*," said Ned. "But I know where he was. You come along with me."

Nothing loth, for in very sooth he was willing to go anywhere on this errand, Robert followed him out of the coffee-house, accompanied by Joss, who seemed to think that he saw a little light on the horizon, for no sooner were they out of doors, than he gave the general public to know, by a rapid succession of jocund barks, that 'a change had come o'er the spirit of his dream.'

"Madge, my lass," said Ned, when they had entered his cottage, "this is Mr. Robert Atheling of Thorpe Aspen. He's the brother of the young chap that lodged here." Then seeing that a cloud was gathering on her sonsy face, he hastened to add, "He means no harm, lass, but good, nowt but good, as a brother should. His mother's breaking her heart for the lad, an' she wants him back."

Madge was not by any means at ease. She was dubious and unconvinced, and scented danger in the air:—danger to her young favourite, whose safety she had pledged her word to guard, so far as it should lie within her power.

Then her husband told her that he knew their visitor, that he was really Alfred's brother; and Robert explained to her truthfully what his errand to London was, and how it had grown out of the promise he had made by his dying father's bed. Madge could not resist this. She felt intuitively that home with his mother was the place where her late lodger ought to be. Robert's story softened her to

tears. She showed him into the little parlour where there were still some little matters belonging to the absent one, all of which he handled with trembling fingers and a full heart. Amongst the rest there was a small *papier mâché* writing-case. On the inside the cover was written in well remembered characters, "Ralph Ravensworth," and underneath it these words, "For life, I wonder?"

"No, my brother, no, I hope to God!" said Robert, unable to restrain his tears; for he read in it the assumption of a new name, and a doubt, mingled with a great longing, as to whether he would ever again be able to claim his own.

"He promised us," said Ned, "that if ever he needed a shelter he would come here."

"An' welcome he'll be as the flowers in May," chimed in Madge. "Whatever he's gone an' been an' done, the poor young fellow is all right at heart."

"If you will let me have these rooms," said Robert, "I'll pay you well. To live in the very house where the poor lad dwelt will give me heart and hope."

"But you'll give 'em up, if he comes back again," said Madge stoutly. "They're promised to him, you know."

"Ay, I'll give them up," said Robert, who could not help smiling at her fidelity to Alfred's interest, smiling, too, at the thought of his coming back.

In a little while he and Joss were installed as lodgers, and the young man felt cheered and strengthened by the thought that he had secured two faithful allies in Ned Saltmer and his buxom spouse. It soon appeared as if Joss had clearly understood that the honest couple had been taken into partnership, for he attached himself to Ned and Madge and Robert promiscuously; now going with Ned for a saunter, now trudging with Madge to market, and now following at the heels of Robert on his weary tramps through the dreary London streets.

One morning Robert received a letter from his brother

Edgar, requesting him to call on a certain corn merchant whose great warehouses lined the borders of the Thames, and who for many, many years, had purchased the corn and other crops that had been raised at Aspen Garth. After breasting for awhile the human waves that rolled through the roaring city, Robert found himself in one of the narrow streets hard by London Bridge. Hoisted high on the front of a tall warehouse he saw the name he sought, EPHRAIM HARTGOLD, CORN MERCHANT.

In response to his inquiry, a stout, pleasant-faced individual came from an inner office.

"Well, friend," said he, "what is thy business?" Like the question, the speaker's tone was brisk and prompt.

"It concerns a consignment of corn from the Athelings of Aspen Garth," said Robert, readily taking the cue of the merchant.

"An honoured name," was the reply, "I am at thy service. Follow me."

As Robert followed him into the inner office, he was more than ever struck with the firm step and erect deportment of the merchant, whose white hair betokened that its owner was fast approaching the allotted term of threescore years and ten. Ephraim Hartgold was a Quaker of the real old-fashioned type. He wore the broad-brimmed hat, the collarless coat, the drab breeches and gaiters, and the voluminous white neckcloth which was the good old mode and fashion among his sect in the days when George the Third was King. The old-fashioned pronouns too, 'thou,' 'thee,' and 'thy,' did unflinching duty in his common conversation. He possessed, also, all that sterling character for uprightness and integrity which hath ever marked that peculiar people.

The immediate business in hand was very soon despatched, although nothing could surpass the careful and methodical way in which the merchant went about it.

"And now," said he, "that we have finished the matter of business which brought thee here, I would fain induce thee to favour me with a visit to Sharon Lodge. Thy father and I have had business relations from the time that he succeeded his father to the heritage of Aspen Garth. He was a good man and true, the ideal of probity and the soul of honour; and I count it no small honour that he accounted me his friend. It would make me glad if the same relationship may be continued in the person of his son."

"It is very pleasant to me," said Robert, "to hear you speak thus of my honoured father. I have often heard him speak with equal warmth and respect of yourself. I need scarcely say that I, too, should be glad to inherit your friendship and confidence, as it has fallen to me too to become the heir of Aspen Garth."

"Thou wilt follow in thy father's steps, young man; they will lead thee to the same holy place. 'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,' and his heritage shall dwell in 'peace.' Give me thy promise that thou wilt visit Sharon Lodge. My wife Keturah and my daughter Ruth will give thee a true Friend's welcome there."

"Excuse me at present, Mr Hartgold. The fact is, that I have sorrowful business in hand at present. I feel that I may make it known to you. I am searching for a brother of mine who has got himself into serious trouble."

Forthwith Robert told the merchant the whole sad history, and solicited his advice.

"I wish I could give thee a helping hand," said Ephraim Hartgold, thoughtfully rubbing his beardless chin. "Hast thee advertised for the youth in the public papers?"

"Yes, over and over again, and as clearly as I dared," replied Robert.

"I fear thy search may be a long one," said the

merchant. "As for advertising, even with a view to restore lost money, it seems to be ineffective; at least so it has been in my case, for I could not find an owner. Some time ago I picked up a bag of gold containing much money. It was left behind in a public conveyance by two young men—the worse for liquor, I thought—who suddenly left the vehicle to hail a comrade in the street. I discovered their loss as soon as they had left, and hastened after them. But the crowd in Regent Circus was so great, and something especial was to be seen, I think, that I quite lost sight of them. By the way," he continued, looking earnestly at Robert, "now I come to think of it, the younger of them bore a marked resemblance to thyself. I remember at the time being struck with something of the kind; thou art greatly like thy father."

Robert looked at the speaker with intense interest. Had he here found another clue?

"Indeed!" said he, "and what of the money? Did you never find the owner?"

"No; as I was saying, I give notice to the police. I advertised in the newspapers. In short, I did all I could to put the matter right. The bag is at this moment locked safely up in my oak cabinet at Sharon Lodge. There is nearly three hundred pounds. It is contained in a brown canvas bag with the letters 'H. H.' printed on it in black ink, and is tied with a piece of green tape."

"H. H.!" said Robert, leaping to his feet. "That would stand for Hudson Harvey, Alfred's employer! O my God, can this be true?"

"Thee ought not to mention that Name," said Ephraim seriously. "Nevertheless thou hast some reason for surprise. Come with me to Sharon Lodge."

Robert eagerly complied. Oh, if it were true!—If his brother Alfred had not embezzled the money after all!

CHAPTER XXI.

HAROLD SPOFFORTH'S RANSOM IS APPLIED FOR; AND HIS SISTER ETHEL RECEIVES HER COMMISSION.

"Thy letter was a flash of lightning,
Illuming night with sudden glow;
It served with dazzling force to show
How deep my misery is, how fright'ning."

Heine.

HAROLD SPOFFORTH lay chafing his bonds and cursing his misfortunes,—no, his misconduct now, for the young prodigal has had time to think, has had sharp medicine to lead him thereto, and the result his shame and confusion of face. At Aspen Towers another shadow settles down besides that which has been brought by his own sad and sinful course. Sir Godwin, his father, is smitten with a paralytic stroke. He sits imprisoned in his library day by day. He is afflicted in body and sick at heart. He is fretful and querulous with everybody, not even excepting the good and gentle Ethel, whose pilgrimage in search of her brother had been thus delayed. To her it was a time of great tribulation. Although the long, deep silence of her heartless brother caused her anxieties to deepen and increase, her whole soul went out towards her father in his affliction, and she became his tender assiduous, and self-forgetful nurse.

"I'll tell you what it is, Miss," said Nancy Holmes. "It's my opinion that if you don't leave Sir Godwin to me and Thompson, you'll soon be worse than he is."

"I can't help it," said Ethel, pale, worn, and hollow-eyed. "Dear father has but me to care for him, and my life is bound up in his. Oh, if only Harold would come home!"

Nancy silently retired, for she, together with nearly all that knew him, had no hope that Harold Spofforth would ever be other than he was, a life-grief to his father, a bitter sorrow to his sister, and the ruin of himself. As she closed the door behind her she heard her young mistress sobbing aloud, and crying—

"O brother Harold! brother Harold! Will you never come?"

The baronet, too, whose mental powers seemed to be affected, had got hold of the idea that Harold had been sent for; and there was something intensely touching in his plaintive words, words which had come to be a daily and almost hourly formula—

"Hasn't Harold come yet? When do you think he will be here?"

So the weary days past by, and Ethel's faith and patience were tried as gold in the fire. But like gold, they stood the test, and hoping by naked faith alone, hoping against hope, she still believed that she should be permitted to bring Harold home.

One morning, as Ethel was taking her melancholy morning meal alone, for her father did not rise until late in the day, Thompson the butler brought in a singular, foreign-looking letter, addressed to herself, and bearing the postal stamp of Spain. She opened it with trembling fingers and a cold fear at her heart, and this is what she read:—

"My dear Sister,—Somehow in writing from this den of thieves, into which my own mad folly has brought

me, I do not feel that I have any right to call you thus. At any rate, I have been anything but a dear brother, except in a ruinous sense; and I blush for shame as I write to you whom I have so greatly grieved and so shamefully neglected. I feel as though I would gladly be other and better than I am, but it is too late. The die is cast, and perhaps if I had my liberty I should fail to—but no, I think not. I hope to God, living or dying, that is gone for ever. I am a prisoner, and in the power of the notorious Red Pedro, the brigand of whom you have doubtless heard. He asks as my ransom the sum of ten thousand pounds, and he declares that he will have it or my life. I do not doubt his word. He is a fiend incarnate, and is capable of any atrocity. I have been a failure all my life, and am as bad as bad can be. I am not worth ransoming at any price. I am compelled to write this, otherwise I would not pen a line of it. Hitherto I have refused to do so, but they have resorted to such means, the demons, that I am bound to yield. Honestly, I believe it best that my father should not further involve himself. The estate I have impoverished cannot bear it. Break the news to him gently, though I don't see why he should care. Poor father! I've been,—but there! where is the use? Forgive me for all the sorrow I have caused you. Ask my father to forgive me. May God forgive me!"

A postscript was added containing directions as to how and where the money might be sent.

It is needless to say that Red Pedro had read this epistle before it was despatched. He cared nothing about the strong remarks made about himself, and was sufficiently acquainted with human nature to know that the sentences deprecating the payment of the money were most likely to have the opposite effect. Latterly, Harold's experiences had been of the most painful kind, and it was only when

Red Pedro proceeded to carry out his threat that he would send first an ear, then a hand, by way of a 'demand to pay,' that the young man, at his wits' end, had written as above.

Poor Ethel! She sat, pale and wan with watching and sore trouble, looking into vacancy, with the ill-starred letter on her knee. Oh how she pined just then for a mother's counsel, love, and aid! Her mother! The thought impressed her greatly, held her firmly, controlled her fully. What was it that led her forthwith to seek her mother's grave?

Hastily donning her hat and a warm, grey shawl, she passed out of the house and through the shrubbery to the cottage of the old gardener, who was also clerk and sexton to the little grey weather-beaten church whose square tower and short spire peeped above the elms. Having got the key, she proceeded to the church, quietly unlocked the door and paced the stone floor towards the chancel, with Harold's letter still in her hand. The letter reminded her of King Hezekiah, and what he did when in awful straits:

"*And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messenger and read it, and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord.*"

In obedience to this suggestion, she entered the chancel, knelt by her mother's tomb, and spread out the letter on the breast of the marble effigy of her honoured parent which covered the surface of her grave. Leaning her fair head upon it she pleaded with Heaven, while the sorrowful epistle became blistered with her tears. Then she cried aloud the petition of the troubled king of Judah—"Help, O Lord, and save us, for Thy mercy's sake!"

"Amen, Lord, amen! An' there's nowt so sure!"

The startled girl rose to her feet, to see Simon Holmes kneeling on the floor with his grey head in his hands, and bowed down almost to the ground!

"O Simon!" said the wondering Ethel, "whatever led you to come here?"

"Nay, Miss Ethel, that I can scarcely tell," said the old carpenter. "'He leadeth us by a way that we knoa not.' Jake Martin the postman said that he had a foreign-looking letter for you. I seemed to feel all at once that there was trubble lapped up in it. So I said to 'Becca, ''Becca, I'm foorced to go up to the Hall, ha' yo' ony message for Nance?' I wondered to see t' chotch door oppen as I passed, so I stepped inside. When I saw yo' on your knees, I knew in a minute that you were i' better company than mahne, so I just knelt doon an' said, 'Amen!'"

"Thanks, Simon," said Ethel, "you are always thoughtful and kind. My heart was very sad and sore, and somehow I felt drawn to my mother's grave. I'm better now."

"No doot you are, Miss, an' equally no doot you were drawn with a purpose. Them words on my lady's moniment hev a sarmon in 'em o' theirselves."

Ethel turned as Simon pointed and read, "Her trust was in the Lord her God." Then casting her eye above the line she read, "The beloved wife of Sir Godwin Spofforth, and the daughter of Sydney Railton, Esq. of Enderby." In a moment it flashed upon her mind, that by the will of her maternal grandfather the sum of ten thousand pounds was left for her own use and benefit, and that as she was now of age it was at her own disposal. Hitherto she had never needed it, never thought of it. Now it represented Harold's ransom! She felt stunned, half dazed, turned pale, and might have fallen but for the ready hand of Simon Holmes.

As they walked towards the Towers, Ethel remembered that she had left the letter in its place on the recumbent statue of her mother, and asked Simon Holmes to fetch it for her. As the old man handed her the pregnant missive, he said—

"Whativer there is in it, Miss, you were right to tak' it to

the Lord. He's fond o' bein' trusted with all your seacrets, an' all the wo'ld can't show a Coonsellor so good an' wise as Him. That's what King Hezekiah did when Sennacherib sent him a letter full o' blasphemy; an' threatenin' to mak' the streets o' Jerusalem to run wi' blood. Hezekiah just went as you did, an' he 'spread it befoor the Lord.' An' that varry neet, while t' enemy's soldiers were sleepin' i' their tents an' t' sentinels were on the watch, God's angel com' an' fowt the battle for him; an' Hezekiah gat the victory withoot unsheeathin' a single soord, or liftin' a single lance, or bendin' a single bow. So it'll be wi' you, for it's true o' you as it was o' my lady, 'She put her trust in the Lord her God.'"

Simon was pleasantly astonished at the peaceful smile that lit up Ethel's pale features, as she replied, "It's all right, Simon, I did well to come. The hand of the Lord is with me, and my mission will be done."

Then she told him of the letter and of her intention, if needs be, to devote her fortune for her brother's ransom.

"But how shall I tell my father about it, Simon? Another stroke would kill him."

"I reckon the Lord 'll put that right, as well as this," said the old carpenter; and having arrived at the Towers, Simon made his way to have an interview with Nance in the housekeeper's room.

Ethel's difficulty was solved for her, as Simon had said. She was met at the door by Thompson, the butler.

"O Miss," said he, "Sir Godwin is in a terrible way! Just when we had got him brought down and placed comfortably in the library chair, the postman brought another letter that had been forgotten at Chilworth post-office. It was just like that that came for you this morning. Sir Godwin knew the man had come; he saw him pass the window, and I was forced to let him have it. You know, Miss, you told us that it would be dangerous to cross him.

Ever since, he has been groaning and weeping and wringing his hands. I'm afraid he'll have another fit!"

"Wherever have you been, Ethel?" said her father as she entered the library. He was almost scarlet with excitement, and kept vainly trying to rise and stand upon his poor useless feet. "Read that! Read that! Read that!" he said with feverish rapidity, pointing to a letter on the table. Ethel soon discovered that the former letter must have been delayed in its transmission, for this was of a much later date. It ran thus:—

"My dear Sister,—The patience of my wolfish captors is exhausted. Latterly I have been made to suffer greatly. Red Pedro has just sent to say that he will give me one chance more. But if the ransom does not come within twenty-eight days, I am to be shot. I am compelled to write this letter, as my jailor is looking on. If you could send some trusty messenger with a less sum, perhaps they would accept it. I do think I should lead a better life, and it is hard to die without the opportunity to reform. I deserve it, however, and if it is to be, I cannot rebel against it. Pray for me, dear sister, and if you hear from me no more, believe that I died asking forgiveness for myself, and His blessing on those on whose lives my sin and folly has brought so dark a cloud."

Poor Ethel! Her heart sickened, the pallor of death came over her features, and staggering to a sofa she sank into a swoon.

"O my darling!" cried the baronet, and tore at the bell-pull with the energy of alarm and fear.

After a while Ethel recovered, and asked if Simon Holmes had gone. The old carpenter came in. There was a set resolve on Ethel's brow, and withal the return of a settled calm; and in her eyes a light 'not born of sun or stars.'

"Simon, I want you to help me to explain to my father that I have now received my commission, and that I am going at once to fetch dear Harold home. I shall give orders to get his room ready. Father, trust in God. All will be well!"

"You?" said the Baronet. "Impossible!"

"Both possible and sartain, Sir Godwin," said the carpenter. "I would recommend that Jacob Benson goes with her. He sarved in the Peninsula, an' picked up a goodish bit o' Spanish; besides, he's gotten a pair o' brawny airms, Jacob hez."

"Good," said Ethel. "And now I have no time to lose."

Leaving her father in the hands of Simon Holmes, a thoroughly effective physician in his way, Ethel retired to make immediate preparations for what she lightly called her "trip to Spain."

CHAPTER XXII.

SIMON HOLMES IS ON HIS MASTER'S BUSINESS; AND THE BARONET COMES INTO AN ESTATE.

"Speak to me low, my Saviour, low and sweet,
From out the hallelujahs, sweet and low,
Lest I should fear and fall, and miss Thee so,
Who art not missed by any that entreat."

E. A. Browning.

ETHEL SPOFFORTH knew full well what she was about when she enlisted the aid of Simon Holmes, and commissioned him to put matters so before her father that he might coincide with her immediate departure, in the sure hope that success would crown her efforts, and that she would soon return in triumph with Harold at her side. She herself had had experience of the 'way' that Simon had with sick and sorrowful people, and had long desired that her stricken father might have experience of it too. It was very necessary for his very life's sake that her father's excitement should cease, and if it was within the power of man to calm him down, Simon Holmes, thoughtful, gentle, sympathetic Simon, thought she, is the man to do it.

She had long desired that her father might be induced to think more fixedly and seriously on those all-important

questions which are so apt to be put aside as matters of little moment; those questions which have to do with the soul and the Saviour; with holiness, death, immortality and God. To Ethel, as we have seen, all these things were of prime importance, and she longed that her father should be, as her mother had been, 'partner in like precious faith.'

In this sacred and peculiar lore Simon Holmes was a learned man, more learned than many a theological Rabbi, for he had obtained his wisdom from the Fountain-Head: and he could tell the things he knew more effectively than many an eloquent divine, because his strong common sense was imbued with the influence of his religious faith, and because his inmost heart found utterance through the channel of his speech.

There was one other peculiarity about Simon as a past-master in the secrets of the sacred Science, he always mistrusted his own powers to do justice to his theme, and to give the message aright that he had received from his Master. This led him at almost every sentence, on such occasions, to lift his heart to the God of Heaven as Nehemiah did in the presence of his king, and to ask silently for 'mouth, matter and wisdom,' a trinity of factors in his religious conversation by which his power in that department was sufficiently accounted for.

After Ethel had left the room, Simon sat silent for a moment or two pondering on what it would be best to say to the fuming and excited baronet, in order to bring him to a quiet mind. The baronet prepared the way for him.

"Oh dear, dear, dear!" said he fretfully, placing a hand on each arm of his chair, as though he would rise to his feet in spite of the iron bands of paralysis that held him down,—"Whatever is to be done about that unhappy boy?"

"Why, just what is being done, Sir Godwin. Miss Ethel's gotten hold o' the right end o' that skein, you may

depend on it. The best thing to do with Mr. Harold is to bring him home, both for your sake an' for his. I've always said that there's a warm heart beatin' under Mr. Harold's wescut, if it could only be gotten at. An' it's my opinion that a' look at his fayther's grey hairs is just the thing to touch it. Miss Ethel's set her mind on bringin' him back to God, as well as to you; an' that would help her amazin'!"

The baronet listened. He was not quick, now, at taking in the meaning of unfamiliar remarks, and he remained silent; but was evidently thinking.

"An' then again," persisted Simon, "there's nowt that would do you more good, scarcely, an' help to set you on your feet again, Sir Godwin, than to hev Mr. Harold sittin' by your side wi' his hand i' yours, an' sayin', 'Here I am, dear father; niver to leave yo' ony more.'" That delightful picture the baronet could understand, and it went straight to his heart.

"O Simon Holmes! Simon Holmes!" said he, stirred even to tears, "that would indeed act like a charm on these poor limbs of mine. But oh, dear, dear, how can such a thing be?"

"The mouth o' the Lord hath spokken it, Sir Godwin," replied Simon quietly and firmly. "If you'll be good anuff to listen to me a bit, I'll tell you my reeasons for sayin' so."

The baronet nodded a permission, but he heaved a sigh at the same time which did not express much confidence in the result. Simon proceeded to marshal his arguments.

"There's Miss Ethel. A finer soul, short o' bein' an angel, dizn't exist. That you kno', Sir Godwin. Well, she lies at the very farrest end o' the valley o' the Shadow of Death, so far from this wo'ld that we varry nearly lost sight of her, an' so near the land where her Saviour is, an'

so close to the gates o' pearl that she can hear 'em inside a harpin' wi' their harps, an' can catch a glint o' their shinin' wings. Then the Lord brings her back again by a merricle, Sir Jarvis's dream an' what followed it was lahtle short o' that, an' that you knoa. When she cums back to yo' i' health an' strength, an' wi' some o' the fragrance o' Beulah land clingin' aboot her, an' some o' the leet that shone on her through the gates in her bonny blue eyes, she says, 'The Lord's raised me up for a purpose, an' that is to bring my brother Harold home to his father.' I think you'll own 'at all that's true?"

Again Sir Godwin nodded his head, but he continued silent.

"Then time passes," said Simon, continuing his story. "Fifty things cums up that seems to hinder her from settin' off; your oan failin' health, Sir Godwin, amang the rest, an' all the tahme poor Harold has fallen amang thieves an' you didn't kno' it. Then comes that letter of his. It's for his sister, but it falls into your hands that it may sooner tak' effect. It gives both you an' her a push, like, as much as to say, 'It's high time for her to be off.' Then something tells her—you hear that, Sir Godwin?—something tells her to go to her mother's grave, bless her, an' she prays to her mother's God for strength an' guidance. While she's standin' there, readin' what's on the monniment, the Lord reminds her that all the money she needs to buy Mr. Harold's liberty is lyin' riddy for her, an' that she's nothing to do but to go to the appointed spot, an' say, 'Here's the money,' pay it doon, put her airm through her brother's an' say, 'Father wants you, brother Harold: come home wi' me.' Will he come? do you say. His letter tells you that, poor lad, plain anuff. Miss Ethel comes straight away back from t' chotch an' she says to you, I heeard her, 'Father, I've received my commission, I'm goin' to fetch Harold home. Get his room ready, for

he'll come back wi' me.' All that's the simple truth, Sir Godwin. Isn't it?"

Sir Godwin could not do other than reply—

"Yes, Simon, it has all been as you say."

"Very well, then," said the carpenter, "I put it to you, Sir Godwin, whether the Lord's hand isn't in it? I don't think it's half so hard to bring Mr. Harold back, as it was to bring Miss Ethel back. She was a good deal nearer bein' gone altegither, than he is. The Lord said to her, '*Talitha cumi*, Maiden, I say unto thee, arise:' an' it's just as easy for Him to say to Red Peter, or whativer else the rascal's neeame is, 'Loose him, an' let him go.' That's what He said aboot Lazarus, an' you'll admit that he was a good deal farther gone when the Lord fetched him back than Mr. Harold is. I tell you, it's as sartain as that yon sun 'll set i' the west when his day's jonnay's ower. All that you ha' to do, Sir Godwin, is to sit still an' see the salvation o' God. It may be that the Lord's compelled you to sit, so that you mayn't interfere with His designs. O Sir Godwin, hev faith in God! I said that the mouth of the Lord hath spokken it. Believe Him! If you do, it will be better for yourself an' for Miss Ethel an' for Mr. Harold an' all."

"Well, Simon," said the baronet with a sigh that was half faith and half fear, "I cannot deny it. It's all very strange. I could wish that I had your firm, unquestioning faith."

"An' why shouldn't you, Sir Godwin?" said Simon quietly and encouragingly. "It's for you as much as for onybody else. The good God wants to strengthen an' save you an' comfort you. I don't kno' onybody that needs Him more, an' I kno' there's nobody i' the wo'ld more welcome to all that He can do. When He says, 'My grace is sufficient for thee,' He means, for *you*, Sir Godwin, just as much as he meant it for St. Paul that he said it to

at fost. What's to hinder you from sayin' 'Lord, help me,' as well as ony poor sinner that was iver saved? What's to hinder you from sayin' what you've already put on my lady's grave-stone, 'My trust is in the Lord my God'? Oh, hoo He would comfort you in your affliction an' help you to beear your griefs! You kno' what He's done for Miss Ethel, bless her; an' He seems to be intent on bringin' Mr. Harold on t' same rooad, an' it stands to reason that He wants you all to be saved an' blest, that you may meet my lady i' the land o' rest when you've all passed the waves o' this trubblesome wo'ld."

Here Simon was silenced by the discovery that his companion had bowed his grey head upon his hands and had abandoned himself to an access of sobs and tears. Then as he thought of his many griefs, of his poor useless limbs, of his general excellence of character, all his soul went out to him in tender pity and desire, and his silent prayers went up to heaven that this redeemed and tearful penitent might find the faith that casts out fear, the loving and gracious Saviour who had redeemed him with His blood.

"In Lady Spofforth's life," said the baronet in subdued tones, as soon as he could command himself, "I thought little and cared less about these things, Simon. More shame on me. But Ethel's strange recovery, and all the influence of her piety and faith, have led me to think seriously, and to look into my own heart. I have often thought that if I had been other and better than I am, my son Harold would have been other and better too. I've been wrong, Simon Holmes, I *am* wrong, but alas, I can see no way to mend matters either in myself or him."

"That's just the beauty o' the grace an' goodness o' the Saviour, Sir Godwin. *We* can't mend ourselves, an' it's a grand point gained when we finnd that oot. Then, *He* undertak's to mend us. 'Blessed are they that mourn,'

He says, 'for they shall be cumforted:' an' if you mourn for your sins an' tonn to Him, He'll save yo' an' bless yo', an' will in no wise cast yo' oot. Here's the point, Sir Godwin. If you're tired o' your sins, an' feel your need of a Saviour, then He bore your sins when He died on the cross, an' if you trust in the merit of His death, your sins which are many shall be all forgiven. Wi' you, as wi' ivery body else it is just this—

'I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all,
But Jesus Christ is my All in All.'

I tell you, Sir Godwin, there's anuff gospel i' them two plain lines as 'll lift ony sinner oot o' condemnation into salvation, an' cause 'em to rejoice in God their Father an' their Friend. When t' poor publican went up at t' same tahme wi' the Pharisee to the temple to pray, the Pharisee didn't want mendin'. He didn't feel the need on it. He just stood bolt upright, an' thanked God that he was all right; an' so he went back again not a whit better than he com'. But t' publican knew he was wrang. He said just as you ha' said, 'I'm wrang, an' I can't mend myself.' He sighed an' wept just as you are sighin' an' weepin' noo; an' he prayed, just as you'll pray, won't you, Sir Godwin? 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' an' *he* went away justified, pardoned, at peace wi' God an' his oan conscience, just as you'll be, Sir Godwin, I knoa you will; just as my lady was when she was ta'en up into heaven; just as Miss Ethel is, God bless her! riddy ony minute to go there. O.Sir Godwin! Dry your tears, or rayther look through 'em to the Cross on which *your* Saviour died, and say—

'Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.'"

"Simon Holmes," said Sir Godwin, quickly but with an earnestness not to be mistaken, "will you pray for me?"

The good carpenter did not need to be twice invited to do that. That was what he had been doing at almost every sentence he had spoken. The while he prayed, slowly and simply, so that the penitent seeker after God might follow him, the while he led him to plead for himself the atoning merit of Christ, the man for whom he prayed, the man who in his heart was praying too, found the light; —the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world revealed Himself to the weary soul that sought Him, and Sir Godwin Spofforth was able to say with Thomas in glad conviction, "My Lord and my God!"

It may well be questioned whether Simon Holmes himself had ever felt more fully the sweet rewards of doing good than he did when Ethel came into the library on some errand connected with her 'mission.' The baronet called her to his side, and taking her hand in his own, sat looking at her with a new light in his eye, and an unaccustomed peace on his face.

"My darling," said he, "your father has found his Saviour. My Ethel and I will travel heavenward together. Your sainted mother is already there."

Ethel had no word to say in answer. She could only look her glad content. She kissed him on either cheek and tried to say, "dear father," and failed in the effort. Then taking Simon Holmes' honest hand in both her own, she imparted a similar telegraphic smile, and escaped from the room to 'have it out,' as she afterwards confessed, with herself and with her God.

When Simon Holmes returned to his study, 'Becca greeted him with—

"Why, Simon, you look as though somebody had left you a fortun'; whatever mak's you look so glad?"

"'Becca, my lass! Sir Godwin's gotten *his* fotten, an' I've left him rejoicin' 'at t' title-deeds are seeafe in his possession."



"'My darling,' said he, 'your father has found his Saviour.'"—*Page* 188.

"Whativer do ye mean, Simon?" said his wondering wife.

"I mean that he knoa's hisself to be 'a' heir o' God an' a joint-heir wi' Jesus Christ!' an' that's an estate compared wi' which Aspen Chase is no better than a cabbage garden!"



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CASTAWAYS FIND REFUGE IN THE "GOOD INTENT;" AND CAPTAIN CRUMPIT HAS A WORD TO SAY ON FLOATING COFFINS.

"Mark, mark Ulysses how the gods preserve
The men they love, even in their own despite!
They guide us and we travel in the dark!
But when we most despair to hit the way,
And least expect, we find ourselves arrived."

Lansdowne.

"THE evening and the morning were the second day." As the sun dipped behind the western waters, a great gloom fell on the little band of hapless voyagers, drifting in such sore straits upon the bosom of the pathless sea. Never castaway mariner on an ocean rock did scan the horizon with such a longing heart and searching gaze as did Alfred Atheling, and that by no means on his own account, but for the sake of the gentle Inez, whose powers of endurance were almost at an end.

Suddenly, the deep silence which had fallen upon them was broken by Will Trounce, the keen-eyed mariner who had boasted for Inez's benefit that he could see a full-rigged bark at all but impossible distances.

"A sail! a sail!" said he, and it may well be believed that the honest tar put all the soul he had into the cheering news.

"Where away, mate?" said Joe Hewitt, so excited that he sprang to his feet. Looking in the direction indicated by his mate, he too saw the welcome sight, and just as if it had not been announced at all, turned incontinently to Inez, with a radiant smile upon his face—

"A sail! a sail, Miss! It must ha' dropped down right away from Heaven to save you from another awful night."

"Can't make it out," said Will, "that we didn't see it in daylight. Seems like as you say, that it's either come down from Heaven on a marciful errand; or otherwise, it's been lyin' ready for us, down i' some port i' the deep sea, an's risen up on purpose to fetch the maiden out o' the jaws o' death."

"An' if it had," said Joe, "she's worth working a merrycle for. I think it's her that's kept us all afloat so long. God A'mighty wouldn't let her drown."

Meanwhile the oar was high uplifted. The red shawl was hoisted, and then, first one and then another shouted across the deep. It was unheeded, perhaps unheard, and the twilight was settling down so that they were most likely unseen. Captain Lanyon bethought him of his pistol. By his direction the little crew gave one loud simultaneous shout; then he fired his pistol, one, two, three, with little intervals between.

"Hark!" said Trounce, whose ear seemed to be as quick as his eye. A moment's pause followed, and then they heard an answering shout, and then another.

A low cry broke from the exhausted maiden, in the excitement of this new hope, as she said—

"Thank God! Thank God! He has sent us help at last."

Strange to say, just then there came a sudden darkness, and the strange craft on which all their hopes were set vanished utterly from their sight. Their new

kindled expectations of deliverance seemed blighted in their very birth. In vain the practised eye of Will Trounce tried to pierce the gathering dark. He shouted, shouted loud and louder, but the only answer was the gruesome sound of the rising wind which threatened stormy weather. A faint cry of pain was uttered by Inez. Alfred turned to cheer her, but her strength had failed her; collapse had come, and the poor girl fainted on his friendly arm. As the young man held the precious and unconscious burden, he felt that he could willingly lay down his life, his worse than useless life, if by that means he might save a life so young, so fair, so good, from the fate which certainly awaited her if this their latest hope should come to naught. He was certain that she could never endure another long, long night upon that wild and wintry sea.

Again the captain fired his pistol in the air, and now that the darkness had deepened, its flash was clearly seen. In a few moments a rocket rose up quite near them, whizzing upward with a swift and rushing sound which fairly startled the occupants of the boat, and helped to restore to consciousness the maiden in the stern.

The light of the rocket illumined the surface of the sea all around them, lit up their faces, and revealed the dark hull and the tall masts of a ship close at hand. Again our waifs of the ocean gave an answering shout, and a sympathetic cheer from the ship told them that help had really come.

"Thank God!" said Captain Lanyon, who at set of sun had felt that his hope was set too, for he saw that his darling's strength was gone, and his warm heart was sore within him.

"Thank God!" said Alfred Atheling, heaving a long drawn sigh of relief, not one whit for his own sake but for the gentle and suffering maiden lying so listless and helpless on his breast.

With three experienced mariners like Captain Lanyon,

Joe Hewitt, and Will Trounce on board the little skiff, it was not long before they reached the welcome ark which had come down in the dark to their relief, and the willing hands of these on board the ship were soon congenially employed in hoisting them on deck.

"Look here, mates," said Joe Hewitt, to the sympathetic tars who had lent them a lift and were conducting them to the fore-cabin, "I reckon this 'll bring a bit o' special luck to this ere bark, let alone the marcy that it's brought to us. For why? Good reason, you're entertainin' an' angel unawares. Them's my sentiments.'

"An angel i' everything but wings," said Will Trounce, "an' she would ha' had them afore mornin', I's thinkin'. An' them's mine."

Both Inez and Alfred as it now appeared, now that the strain was over and reaction had come, were very ill. All unused to such sharp exposure, they had suffered severely. The captain of the vessel had the maiden placed in his wife's cabin. Alfred was otherwise cared for, and both were invalids that it was essential to treat as such. The "seasoned timbers" of Captain Lanyon and his two comrades had enabled them to endure the test, and according to the judgment of the worthy skipper of the bark, "a good stiff glass o' grog or two would make them as right as ninepence." Why ninepence should be regarded as specially right, more so than any less or even larger sum, does not appear.

In the course of the evening Captain Lanyon told his host the story of the *Boadicea* and its fate, and of their subsequent wanderings on the sea. That which roused the listening skipper to boiling point was the description of the ill-fated ship, and how poor a fight she made of it when the sea began to try her. The story elicited some very strong expletives from the indignant listener, more strong than graceful by far, and so I will leave them out.

"I call 'em murderers, reg'lar, downright assassins. Owners that'll send craft like that to sea, because they're covered by insurance, regardless of what becomes of the men that mans 'em,—they have no consciences, and their hearts are as callous as the coat of an alligator. I suppose that *Boadicea* o' yours was just about as rotten in her timbers, as soaked junk in a leaky barrel."

"She was very creaky an' cranky, too," said Captain Lanyon, a little more moderately.

"Rotten, sir! rotten, I tell you, as sure as my name's Crumpit,—every beam an' plank an' stay. But consarn their rascally little souls, not half so rotten as the men that owned her. Rotten as medlars all such rascals are, and the devil 'll meddle with them to some purpose. If he doesn't, then I say it's no use havin' a devil, that's all. What do you say?"

"I'm afraid it's too true. They deserve the most severe punishment," said Captain Lanyon.

"Punishment!" said the irate Captain Crumpit, "hangin's too good for 'em. I should like to gather together a fleet o' them floating coffins. Then I would put owners, merchants, middlemen, underwriters, everybody that has a hand in keeping the ghastly sailor-traps afloat. an' send 'em out of harbour in a reg'lar double-reefed tops'el gale o' wind. It would rid both sea and land of a pack of rubbish, and save thousands of precious sailors' lives."

Captain Crumpit was greatly relieved by this indignant outburst, and more calmly proceeded to give Captain Lanyon some information in return.

"You are on board the *Good Intent*," said he, in answer to Captain Lanyon's inquiry. "As good and well bottomed a ship, ay, and as well managed, though I say it myself, as any ship that dips her nose into salt water. We've a cargo of wheat on board, so packed that ten bushels of it can't shift whatever kind of sea we have.

We're from New York, and we are bound for the port of London, and as for where we are at this present moment, why, I expect and hope to smoke a pipe with the 'Buoy at Nore' in a week or ten days, God willing."

When Alfred Atheling heard that, willy-nilly, he must return to that hateful city, the scene of his own wrong-doing, the place of his greatest peril, with all his new-born hopes and purposes concerning a redeemed life unfulfilled, his pain and disappointment were intense, and he wished that he had gone down with the old *Boadicea* into the depths of the sea. The depressing effect which this discovery had upon him retarded his recovery, and all the time that he remained on board the *Good Intent*, he was weak and ill in body, sad and sick of heart. There was one thing of which he was sure, whatever 'hap the day might bring,' by the help of God, if he could but evade the far-reaching arm of justice, he would never, never again act the fool as in the misspent and wasted past.

"Ralph Ravensworth," said he with a sigh, "shall never carry the disgrace that made Alfred Atheling unfit for wear."

It was well for his prospects in the fulfilment of that vow, that the young man's heart, while these thoughts were passing through his mind, went out in longing to his mother, while his thoughts went up to God. Inez Lanyon still suffered too, and had to keep her berth, with little alternations to the captain's cabin. Nothing could exceed the rough but kindly skipper's attention to his guest.

"It's a rough cage," he said, "for such a dainty bird to be shut up in: but it's better than that bit of a cockle shell you were tumblin' about in when we picked you up; and a plaguey sight better than that creaking old coffin the *Boadicea*. The Boa-dish-you, I should ha' called her, for she'd nearly dished you, an' ta'en you down to Davy Jones in her in'ards, like a boa constrictor. However, all's well

that ends well, an' the old tub's gone. She's 'boa-deceased' now, thank goodness. Ha, ha, ha!" and Captain Crumpit laughed heartily at his own joke.

"You've got a good, well-found, sound bottomed, likely looking craft under you, Captain Crumpit," said Captain Lanyon one day, as they were pacing the deck. "There's some comfort and pride in handling a ship like this."

"Ay, ay, Captain," the other said, "though I say it myself, there isn't a stronger or a sounder craft afloat. She's a bit heavy in her build, and isn't altogether so easy to handle as some; but then she isn't skittish, and she can be depended on in rough and tumble kind o' weather. The fact is," said he, pausing in his walk, and looking at his companion as though he had something to say worth hearing, "the *Good Intent* is like her owner,—sound from stem to stern. If you can say that of a shipowner, you may be quite sure that he'll have his vessels built on the same lines an' kept on 'em, till they can't very well be trusted for age an' wear. Then he'll break 'em up, and not sell 'em for some scoundrel to make a sailor's coffin of."

"I should like, now that my cranky old tub has gone to the bottom, to get a vessel owned by a man of that sort," said Captain Lanyon with a smile.

Why," said Captain Crumpit, "it might happen to be possible. He's got several craft of his own as well as this. They are all in the corn and timber trade mostly. I'll answer for it that every ship's got a good character, because the gov'nor's got a good conscience, an that's an article not too common either on sea or land. If it had been in your case, you would have been dropping anchor in the port of New York by this."

"Who did you say was the owner of the *Good Intent?*" inquired Captain Lanyon, still thinking of possible employment under such a man.

"Why, he's a Quaker corn and timber merchant, whose

warehouses line the Thames side in Smith Street near by London Bridge. His name's Ephraim Hartgold, and he deserves to have such a name, for if ever mortal man in this world had a heart of gold, it's the owner of the *Good Intent.* I dare say he'll board us off Gravesend, for Ephraim Hartgold has a knack of minding his own business pretty smartly, especially so far as his ships are concerned. Now, mark my word, if you happen to be on deck when he comes, the first words you'll hear him say will be,—'Well, Captain Crumpit, what cheer? Are all the hands come back with you safe and sound?' That will be about the size of it: an' I verily believe that he would sooner hear a good account of the men that man the vessel than about either the ship or the cargo. What's the consequence? There's not a man or lad on board the *Good Inten'*, from skipper to cabin boy, that doesn't honour and respect him, or that would spare any amount of pains to serve his interests."

This excellent character, so heartily and spontaneously accorded, made Captain Lanyon more than ever anxious to be taken into the good Quaker's employ, and he determined to try his chances at the earliest opportunity. Soon afterwards the *Good Intent*, favoured with a fair wind and a flow-tide, passed the Nore, and anchored off Gravesend to wait for further orders.

CHAPTER XXIV.

EPHRAIM HARTGOLD HAS AN ADVENTURE; AND HIS DAUGHTER RUTH RECEIVES A MILD REBUKE.

"She frowns no goddess, and she moves no queen;
The softer charm that in her manner lies
Is framed to captivate, yet not surprise,
It justly suits the expression of her face,—
'Tis less than dignity and more than grace."

Sheridan.

WITH a newly-awakened hope that Alfred's lapse from the paths of rectitude and honour had not been so gross as had been feared, Robert Atheling accompanied the Quaker merchant to his home. Sharon Lodge was a large old-fashioned house standing in its own grounds, and situated in a distant suburb of South London. The only members of Ephraim Hartgold's family were his wife Keturah and his daughter Ruth. In the former Robert saw a somewhat short, stout lady, a little over middle age. Her slowly silvering hair, smoothly laid beneath her narrow-frilled white cap, adorned a placid, pleasant face. Her grey eyes, though bright with a kindly gleam, could look you through and through. In her younger days it must have been an uncommonly beautiful face, as beautiful as that of her daughter Ruth, a remarkably attractive maiden of three

and twenty, whose sober-hued apparel did only set off, as plain settings usually do, the beautiful gem within.

Whatever might be said of Ephraim and Ketural Hartgold as to their sober and staid deportment, it would hardly do to describe maiden Ruth in that fashion. In spite of her quiet surroundings she was blithe and gladsome. There was a merry twinkle in her dark eyes and a ready smile always lurking on her lip. She had a most unquakerly tendency to hum little snatches of song, and these were not by any means entirely of a spiritual kind. Both Ephraim and Keturah often felt it their duty to administer a mild rebuke and to put upon her a gentle curb.

"I fear thou art indulging in unseemly levity, my daughter," Ephraim would say in serious tones, like a Nasmyth hammer hesitating to crack a nut.

"Ruth, my child, thou hast need of a little more sobriety," Keturah would say, fixing her grey eyes on the young sinner with a rebuking gleam that only seemed to invite a kiss.

Hereupon Ruth would look silently downward in demure contrition, and take an early opportunity of running upstairs two steps at a time for the delicious privilege of indulging in stolen waters in the shape of another snatch of song. This pair of placid parents could not bring themselves to enforce any stronger discipline than this. Perhaps it was because they rather liked to hear her. This they knew, at any rate, that Ruth Hartgold had a heart of gold, and all their love was centered in their only child.

It will be necessary for us to cause the dial of events to move backward a few degrees in order that we may more clearly understand the course of things, and that we may get an effective look at the interior of Sharon Lodge. Some weeks before the evening on which Robert Atheling was introduced to the merchant's family circle, an event had transpired that interfered somewhat with the precision that

usually marked their household arrangements. Ephraim had returned from his office in the city a full hour later than his customary time. As his daily round and common task had in them all the exactness usually credited to clockwork, the minds of Keturah and her daughter were much exercised as to the cause of his delay. The crumpets had suffered by it, and the tea itself had lost much of its subtle taste and fragrance from the same uncommon cause.

"Thou art late, Ephraim," Keturah had said. "I trust that no untoward circumstance hath detained thee so long?"

"Nay, Keturah," replied her husband. "The world would hardly call it so, forasmuch as I have unexpectedly and indeed undeservedly come into possession of much money."

Here Ruth paused as she lifted her cup to her lips, and gave a curious glance at her father, who was rubbing his smooth chin between his finger and thumb as though he hoped, as in the case of Aladdin and his lamp, to solve the difficulty by friction.

His deep-set eyes twinkled under their white lashes as he said—

"Ho, ho, maiden Ruth. Surely the mention of money is not sufficient to make thee prick thine ears. Thee must not forget that it is the 'root of all evil.'"

"Nay, father. Thee must not tamper with the Scriptures," replied Ruth promptly. "It is the love of it that does the mischief. What *I* get of it, I do not care to keep, so I shall not plead guilty."

"Hast thou found it, then?" said Mrs. Hartgold, keeping to the business in hand, for she was curious to know more.

"Where?" said Ruth, jumping to conclusions.

"Keturah!" said Ephraim, inclined for a little, very little, innocent badinage, "dost thou not remember the

mistake made by thine original grandmother in the garden. Peradventure it was a *golden* pippin that did the damage there." Then relenting, he said—

"I got into a public conveyance to-day, to go to the Oxford Circus. The only fellow-passengers I had were two young men who sat opposite to me. They talked much and laughed much, but they were not wise nor witty. In truth I think they had 'tarried at strong drink until wine had inflamed them.' They appeared much amused, and suspended their conversation to gaze at me and then to eye each other, with a smirk, as I suppose, at my Quaker drab."

"Why should people wear drab to be smirked at?" interposed Ruth.

Both father and mother looked at her solemnly and reprovingly, aiming at her, as it were, a double-barrelled gun.

"I much fear me, maiden," said her father, "that thine own heart goes too much after the vain frippery thou seest on the worshippers of carnal vanities. A right heart and a modest mien is of more use to thee than a bright hood and a kirtle of green."

"Well, one can have a right heart, I hope, without having it wrapped up in drab," persisted the daring girl. "And as for a bright hood, I don't want a hood at all, nor a poke bon—I mean——"

But Ruth's conscience smote her so forcibly that it stopped her flow of speech.

"Ruth," said her mother still more seriously, "I would counsel thee to restrain thy tongue, and not to talk as one of the foolish maidens. As for thine outward apparel, think less of it, and be '*satisfied*,' which, as I have often told thee, is the meaning of thy name."

"Very well, mother," said Ruth with ever such a little ripple of laughter; "but thee must not mention Ruth. I

feel sure that when Boaz fell in love with her, she had neither a drab gown nor a hood. I expect she had a braided kirtle, with a crimson sash and a red poppy or two out of the cornfield in her hair. '*Then* said Boaz unto his servants, Whose damsel is this?' If she had been gleaning in drab, may be she would not have been so well settled in life."

Ephraim Hartgold could hardly get his breath. He looked at Ruth's raven and silky tresses tightly coiled up as if in a prison for safe keeping, as if to assure himself that the red poppy was not already there. He smoothed his own short white hair that lay on his forehead like a fringe. He was sorely perplexed. Ruth saw that he was pained, and her heart of gold could not stand *that.* Her dark eyes glistened with tears as she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him tenderly.

"Forgive me, father," she said, "I am afraid that I am a little light of heart; but rather than vex or grieve thee, I will imprison my wilful tongue as tightly as my hair, and that shall feel the scissors now, only pay me with a smile."

Ruth got the smiles and the kisses too, but the wealth of hair remained intact. Even Quaker Ephraim could not have found it in his heart to lay sacrilegious hands on that. He knew that his girl was beautiful, but it was clearer to him now than ever. For the life of him he could not help depicting in his mind how handsome she would look with her tresses deftly spread and a bright red rose, say, in lieu of a poppy, as a foil to her lustrous eyes. Without further word on the subject he reverted to his evening's experiences.

"The two young men," said he, "one of whom reminded me of a familiar face, were talking of races, actors, theatres, and other such sinful vanities. I gathered that they were that day about to go to some part of Vanity Fair. In

Oxford Street they suddenly jumped out to greet two acquaintances, and told them something eagerly, that elicited some laughter and expressions of delight. As the conveyance moved off I perceived that they had left a bag behind them."

Hereupon Ephraim put his hand into the capacious pocket of his drab coat and produced a bag with the letters H. H. printed on it, and bulky with coin, which clinked as he slightly tossed it in his hand.

"I instantly jumped out," he continued, "in order to restore the bag, but the whole party had vanished like a dream. I put the matter in the hands of the police, and was sometime before I could get it arranged; and at the close of business I repaired to the advertisement office to write a notice and to secure its appearance in to-morrow's papers. That is the story. I dare say I shall soon find an owner for it. Money does not often lie long unclaimed."

So saying, Ephraim Hartgold placed the bag in an old-fashioned oak cabinet and locked it up for safe custody. After this there was a long silence. The fact is, that Ruth's strange remarks had sent the honest Quaker's wits a wool-gathering and Keturah's too. Ruth retired early to her bedroom to continue with flushed face the incipient quarrel between her Quaker conscience and her maiden tastes. Her parents soon followed, thinking of their darling Ruth and of the possibility of some most unquaker-like Boaz coming to carry off the radiant maiden who needed neither green kirtle, rose nor poppy, to advertise her charms.

Then in due course, as we have seen, Ephraim brought into the bosom of the family the manly and stalwart yeoman of Aspen Garth, whose cornfields, far away on the slopes of Aspendale, were probably quite as extensive as those of the Syrian farmer in the immortal story on the

sacred page, and where poppies were quite as plentiful, should any Ruth take a fancy to pluck them there.

Robert Atheling received a hearty welcome both from dame and damsel. The bag was produced, the piece of green tape was untied; the money was counted by Robert himself, and was found to tally in amount exactly with the sum that he had paid to Mr. Harvey to recoup him for the loss he had sustained through Alfred's misdeeds. In all his toilsome and disheartening quest, Robert had happed upon no such encouragement as this; and as he stated his views and unfolded his hopes, and as, brother-like, he sought to lessen all other indictments against Alfred's conduct, and to lay the blame on evil companions and over-geniality, he had thoroughly sympathetic listeners

There was a manly hatred of wrong-doing in the expression of his countenance, in the steady ring of his voice, and in the gleam of his blue eyes, and withal such a depth and tenderness of affection in the tone of the one and the light of the other, that the kindly Keturah could not help laying her hand upon his arm and saying softly and tenderly as a mother might—

"Thee dost well to be hopeful. Thy mother's prayers will not miss their mark. Thy father's prophecy will not miss of fulfilment. God is true."

Ruth was a silent listener. But now and then a tear was secretly removed as it trembled between the silken lashes, by a stealthy finger-tip, and a silent prayer stole upward from her heart for the quick coming of the hour when the dead should be alive again and the lost one found. She did not look their guest in the face much, for whenever she ventured on doing that, she saw a pair of eyes of honest Saxon blue looking into hers with undisguised admiration. So she for the most part looked somewhere else; for every true Ruth, right down from the gentle Syrian maiden to her of the heart of gold, leaves Boaz to

make his own inquiries, while she busies herself with her gleaning as a maiden should.

At a somewhat later hour than usual the Quaker's well-ordered household retired to rest. Robert Atheling thanked his God upon his knees for the bright light that had arisen on the horizon of his brother Alfred's darkened fortunes, and then sank to slumber, wondering whether any pearl in all the world could equal a sweet maiden's sympathetic tear; and thinking that if only Alfred could be found and brought in safety to his mother's side, his own time might perhaps come to walk through the fields of Aspendale with a Ruth among the corn.

And Ruth? Although, as I have said, she had not looked often in the face of the manly and intelligent guest her father had brought home, such furtive glances as she had stolen were remarkably effective, for the yeoman's handsome features were reproduced in dreamland,—but there, —that is a secret, a maiden's secret with which I shall not meddle. Sleep, maiden Ruth, and dream if it so please you. Sure I am, that neither you nor any other maiden can have a better subject for a dream, than that which flits before your mental vision in the silent watches of the night.

Robert Atheling had not been long asleep when he was aroused by a sense of suffocation. Leaping from his bed he discovered that his room was filled with smoke. Hastily unlocking the door, he heard, or thought he heard, the sharp crackling noise of flame from some higher story than that on which he was lodged. Hastily half dressing himself, he sought to rouse the inmates by the ominous cry of 'Fire!'

CHAPTER XXV.

JACOB BENSON AND HIS YOUNG MISTRESS BEGIN THEIR JOURNEY; AND DON ANTONIO DE DIAZ BECOMES A FRIEND IN NEED.

> "I am a gentleman."—"I will be sworn thou art;
> Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, spirit,
> Do give thee fivefold blazon."
>
> *Shakespeare.*

HAVING once had it clearly borne in upon her mind that the time had come and that the path of duty was made plain, Ethel Spofforth conferred not with flesh and blood, but set about the work of preparation with promptness and despatch. It was a capital thought, that of Simon Holmes', that Jacob Benson should accompany her to Spain. Jacob had been a soldier, had served in the Peninsular war, and after that had fought under the flag of Don Carlos, a pretender to the Spanish throne. He had a considerable knowledge of the country, of the people, and of the language too. Besides, as Simon had said, he was brave, strong, and had a pair of vigorous arms at his young lady's service and the will to use them; for like everybody else, he thought Miss Ethel to be deserving of all love, reverence, and respect.

First of all, Ethel went to Chilworth and had an interview with her father's bankers. Of course, in the light of the

fact that her own fortune was at her own disposal, there was no difficulty there. Indeed the interview was most satisfactory, for she found them not only willing to supply her with what she required, but so to aid her that she should have no financial hindrances in her course through France and Spain. The journey from Chilworth to London and from thence to Paris was performed quickly and safely; and Ethel found repeated occasion to congratulate herself that she had so willing and capable a henchman at her service as the stalwart gamekeeper, Jacob Benson.

Now there lived in Paris distant relatives of Ethel's mother, with whom, since their removal to the French capital, she had had but little intercourse, though they had often invited her to pay them a visit amid their new surroundings. Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft, as her friends were called, met her at the railway station, and conducted her to the Hotel de Bruxelles. It so happened that their own commodious mansion was undergoing extensive alterations and repairs; and so they had elected to sit clear of all the annoyances incident to a family in such circumstances, and located themselves for a season at that spacious and most convenient hotel.

Of course during her brief stay in the gay city for necessary rest she was introduced to several friends of the Bancrofts, who seemed to be fond of 'society' and to have a large social circle. Amongst the rest was a certain noble and distinguished-looking cavalier whose name was Don Antonio de Diaz. He was a gentleman, he might truly be called a young gentleman, for his thirty years sat so lightly on him as to credit him with five years nearer youth. He was evidently a special favourite with Mrs. Bancroft, and it was clear that she was proud of having a Spanish Don of such high pedigree beneath her roof. Nor was Mr. Bancroft himself much less captivated by the young Spaniard's courtly grace and winsome social talents. He was early

taken into confidence as to the special reason of Ethel's journey at that season. That much you see was necessary to save her reputation for knowing the usages of 'society;' for who would think of coming to Paris at that season of the year who was not in a way compelled?

It is not to be wondered at that Ethel herself should think highly of the Spaniard. He set himself the pleasant task of treating her with even extra attention, and exerted all his brilliant talents to interest and amuse her. Of course he had an added interest to her in the fact that he came from Spain, the land to which she herself was bound. Don Antonio de Diaz started a little when he heard her name, and when Mrs. Bancroft imparted to him the nature of Ethel's errand, he seemed to be other than at ease. But this was only for a brief moment. He treated the young Englishwoman, he doted on the English, with a high and chivalrous respect, and declared himself intensely affected by her sisterly love, and deeply impressed with her noble courage and devotion.

"I feel," said he, "as though this is an occasion when a knight of Spain, whose name and the fame of whose family has been connected with all that is noblest and best in Spanish chivalry, may offer his services and feel that his sword is drawn against cruel wrong,—for right and justice, and in defence of virtue and beauty."

Ethel did not particularly admire the taste which prompted the latter part of the 'chivalrous proclamation,' but she thought it might be excused on the ground that it was the windy way the countrymen of Don Quixote had been in the habit of talking for many a generation. In the course of a subsequent conversation, in which Don Antonio was treated quite as one of them, he said—

"Red Pedro is a cruel and most determined bandit; but, like his master, he is doubtless not so black as he's painted. It is more than possible, I should say it is highly probable,

that he will take a much less ransom for your brother, if you can only succeed in getting an interview with himself. That of course you cannot do if you go alone."

"Can you tell us, Don Antonio," said Mr. Bancroft, "which is the best route to the out-of-the-way region, and by which the obscure village named in Harold's letter may be reached?"

"Of course I can," said the Spaniard with a smile of conscious wisdom. "That is the region in which our family domains are situated, and there is scarce a valley or a mountain, an auberge or an hospice, within twenty miles of the Montana forest that I am not as intimate with as I am with the boulevards of Paris."

"I greatly regret," said Mr. Bancroft, "that I am unable to leave Paris, on account of the position of trust that I hold. If I could, not even my lameness, nor my ignorance of Spanish, nor my entire ignorance of the country, should prevent me from accompanying my relative on her journey—"

"If Madamoiselle Spofforth will accept my humble services," said de Diaz, "I willingly and eagerly place them at her disposal. This I am bound to say will serve my own purpose at the same time, for I have long promised to pay my friend the Marquis de Herrara a visit, and his chateau lies in the immediate neighbourhood of the postal station to which the letter refers."

"O Don Antonio!" exclaimed Mrs. Bancroft, "how very kind! I *shall* be relieved, for in very truth I did not like the idea of Ethel's going into that region alone."

"Nay, not alone, cousin," said Ethel, "my servant Jacob Benson counts for a good half dozen in himself. Still, I am bound to say that if Don Antonio's own affairs lead him to Spain, and especially to that part of it, I shall be glad and grateful for his guidance."

Mr. Bancroft was vastly relieved in his mind, at least he

said so, and was quite of opinion that it was a stroke of remarkably good fortune that matters should have happed together so favourably. Ethel did not understand 'strokes of fortune,' but she wondered whether it was 'ordered' that she should have the courtly Spaniard for a guide. Everybody seemed to be agreed that the arrangement was everything that could be desired: everybody, at least, except Jacob Benson. Jacob was not fond of the Spaniards as a whole. He distrusted them, and he certainly did not make an exception in the case of Don Antonio de Diaz. The fact is, that the gamekeeper had taken a dislike to the handsome Spaniard, whose diamond rings flashed so brightly, whose perfect rows of teeth gleamed so whitely, and whose moustache was twisted so daintily by the hand that wore the rings.

Blunt, straightforward, shrewd and observant Jacob saw an unpleasant light in the Don's dark eye, and was sure that on more than one occasion he had seen such quick changes of feature and expression that he felt compelled to regard him with strong suspicion and dislike. Of course he did not say much to Ethel. What he did say was received with a smile, for Mr. Bancroft had known Don Antonio for some years, and he declared him to be all that could possibly be desired,—a gentleman. That was proclaimed fully by the 'fivefold blazon' that Shakespeare deemed sufficient, as will be seen by reading the motto at the head of this present chapter. Besides, Ethel Spofforth herself had passed him through her own private crucible without a doubt that he was genuine metal; had weighed him in her balances, and had not found him wanting.

So the thing was done. Ethel and her faithful guard were accompanied across the frontier by the ever respectful and chivalrous de Diaz, to secure the liberation of Harold, whose experiences else would culminate in his quick exit from the world by the crack of a rifle or the point of a bandit's blade.

Don Antonio had suggested that Jacob might well be left in Paris. His brusque and unpolished manners, and the peculiar difficulty of dealing with the sensitive peasantry of the district, especially such as might be in league with Red Pedro, together with his ignorance of Spanish, made it very undesirable that he should hamper his mistress by his possible imprudence. Nothing, however, could induce the prudent Ethel to leave the gamekeeper behind; and by a happy accident, as some would term it, the Don was not aware that Jacob had any personal knowledge either of Spanish or of Spain.

It cannot be questioned that Don Antonio was of immense service to Ethel in keeping her from travelling in wrong directions, in furnishing means of conveyance, and in performing the thousand little acts which saved her journey from being a time of harassment and annoyance, and from all loss of time and mistake of place. She had good reason for coming to the conclusion that it was 'ordered' for her that Don Antonio should be her guide.

One beautifully mild, clear evening, considering the time of year, when the exquisite tints of foliage in the Montana forest were rendered richer by the rays of the setting sun, our little party arrived at the romantic mountain village of Montana. Very tired and very weary, Ethel yielded to the Don's entreaty, in which he was seconded by Jacob Benson, that she should rest a few days to recruit her strength for the final ordeal that awaited her. She would gladly have been content to abide by the letter of the brigand's conditions and have paid the money at the place agreed upon; but Don Antonio most strenuously advised her to see the chief himself, and so possibly save the greater portion of her fortune, as he felt convinced that he could not withstand her personal appeal. He submitted to her a plan of action, and announced his intention of seeing the robber chief himself as Ethel's plenipotentiary, and bringing word again as to

whether the terrible brigand leader would grant her a hearing.

"I shall be back in the course of three days," said he, "safe and sound. But if," he continued in soft and tender tones, "I should happen to fall into the hands of these free-booters, I shall have the consolation of knowing that I have imperilled myself in the effort to bring happiness to the fairest and most charming of her sex."

Then with a low bow and a courtly hand-shake, that had in them the very essence of devotion, he bade her a brief farewell. Ethel was a good deal disconcerted by this speech. His reference to his own possible peril distressed her, and that touch about being the 'most charming of her sex,' she thought was neither well-timed nor in good taste. Still he had hitherto behaved with profoundest courtesy, and the services he had rendered her were very great. Had the fair girl only known that this smooth-tongued Mephistopheles was quietly and surely winding a web around her which would place her at the cruel mercy of his cupidity and lust, she would have bid the stalwart Jacob carry her back that moment into the beaten paths of civilisation, and save her from the fatal storm that was impending overhead.

The village of Montana is now assuming the dimensions of a town. It is situated close upon the borders of the 'forest primeval,' and being surrounded by highly picturesque mountain scenery, with a charming admixture of lake and waterfall, and being favoured with certain medicinal springs of growing repute, it is becoming quite a popular resort. At the time of Ethel's visit, however, it was only a small scattered hamlet with a small handful of rude peasantry, most of whom were more or less the secret allies of Red Pedro and his gang, who combined the profession of smugglers with their other nefarious trade.

Now, it so happened that Jacob Benson found himself in a district with which he had become familiar in former times

when his lot was cast there by the fortunes of war. When he served under the Carlist flag he had encamped within a mile or so of this very spot. He remembered an imposing waterfall, which he and two English comrades had gone to see. Descending from the brink of an elevated ledge of rock it dashed down to a tremendous depth, sheer down in a broad sheet, into a boiling caldron, that for ever hissed and seethed and tumbled in the deep gorge below. The scene had made a lasting impression on his mind, and in conversation with his young mistress concerning his Spanish experiences and his knowledge of that locality, Jacob referred to what was called in local parlance, "The Devil's Caldron" As it was less than an hour's easy walk from the village inn, and Ethel felt a desire to walk, she suggested that he should take her to see the sight. The keeper of the auberge courteously offered his mule for the lady to ride upon, but Ethel felt that the clear mountain air would brace her, and she preferred to take the short journey on foot.

The sight she saw was full repayment for her journey. Ethel stood at a safe distance rapt and spell-bound, gazing on the silver breast of the cataract as it plunged roaring and foaming into the pool below, the waters of which, from brink to brink, were churned into a self-lashed lake of creamy white. They had just turned away from the spot after taking one lingering, admiring look, when they were suddenly confronted with a solitary bandit, of fierce demeanour and well armed. His pistol was in his hand, and the usual dagger gleamed within the girdle round his waist.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ETHEL SPOFFORTH RECEIVES AN ASTOUNDING REVELATION; AND JACOB BENSON FINDS AN UNEXPECTED ALLY.

"If I can catch him once upon the hip,
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him."

. . . . . .

"Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand,
Blood and revenge are hammering in my head.

Shakespeare.

SURELY nothing was less to be expected by a couple of innocent sightseers in that secluded place than an armed brigand, but so it was, and it is needless to say that for a moment or two both Ethel and her henchman Jacob stood bewildered. In terms that were far more vigorous than polite the robber demanded their purses, and no doubt he expected that 'Señor and Señora Inglese' would obey the call with speed and trepidation. That, however, is not precisely the fashion favoured by a true-born Englishman, especially such an one as the Peninsular soldier and ex-Carlist, and stout-hearted, strong-handed Jacob Benson might well be trusted to strike a blow for 'England, home, and beauty.'

In one moment the pistol so suddenly presented was as suddenly sent flying into mid-air by an upward stroke of the

gamekeeper's staff. In another second the astonished and over-bold robber was laid flat on his back with Jacob Benson kneeling on his breast. Quick as thought the hand of the bravo sought his familiar dagger, and had he succeeded in getting it into his grasp, it might have gone hard with the Englishman. But it was not by any means the first time that Jacob had needed to beware of a Spaniard's knife. He had already seized it himself, and now held it aloft in striking attitude just above the eyes of the foiled and defeated robber. Jacob's weight was heavy, and his knee was so deftly placed that under its painful pressure, the man was compelled to cry for mercy. But though mercy is for ever the attribute of the brave it must not be indulged in at the expense of prudence, and that Jacob Benson knew full well.

The gamekeeper lightened the pressure of his knee, but did not relax his grip upon the scoundrel. By his directions Ethel unwound the coloured scarf that had held the dagger, and then wound it around the Spaniard's feet, tightly tying it so that he could barely move. She was sorely frightened, and with an added strength born of a sense of desperation and of excited nerves, she pulled and twisted the silken manacle, so that Jacob himself could scarcely have bound him in stronger bonds. The gamekeeper then proceeded to fasten a stout cord—what gamekeeper at home or abroad was ever without a supply of that essential article in the pockets of his velveteens?—around the wrists of his captive, for the dagger was handy, and the man, like most of his cruel and cowardly tribe, was cowed. The fellow was a prisoner. Jacob had taken him for a prey. Of that there was no room to doubt. But now there arose another question, one that neither he nor maiden Ethel could well answer. What were they to do with him? Honest Jacob scratched his head, as though to draw a suggestion from his brain in that direction; but

it did not help him. He was in a quandary. He had caught a Tartar; or rather perhaps had come into possession of a white elephant. What to do with him, in good sooth, Jacob did not know.

Should he disarm him and let him go? Should he march him off to the village and haul him up before the alcalde, or whatever other legal functionary was available? He felt that it was doubtful whether such a village possessed the article; and he was more than doubtful that the villagers were quite as likely as not to take part with the knight of the road. Then he found himself wondering what could have induced the brigand to sally forth alone, and to go fighting, like Hal o' the Wynd, for his own hand. Then he suddenly thought of the absent Don Antonio de Diaz, and wondered, as he was such a great man in these regions, what effect his name would have upon his captive.

"What will Don Antonio de Diaz have to say when you are brought before him?" inquired Jacob, drawing his bow at a venture.

A sinister flash, noted well by the questioner and by Ethel too, lit up the robber's dark eyes with a dangerous light. The colour mounted to his olive cheeks, and his fettered hands twitched as though they would seek a weapon at his belt, as he replied in a hoarse whisper, and with an awful oath that may not be repeated—

"The black infernal villain. I wish he was in perdition!"

Jacob could not help thinking of the pot's opinion of the kettle; could not help thinking, too, that to perdition both of them would be likely enough to find their way.

Ethel, who had heard the answer and had noted the gleam of rage with which the name of her guide had been received, began to fear for the safety of that gentleman if

he fell into the hands of men who could speak of him like this. She requested Jacob to ask him if he was a member of Red Pedro's band. The question was asked in Spanish, and the reply came instantly.

"I was," said the robber passionately, "Red Pedro had not a more faithful soldier in his troop than I. But as Don Antonio de Diaz! Ten thousand, thousand curses on him as an incarnate fiend."

The last words were hissed out through clenched teeth, and were accompanied by a paroxysm of wrath that made the flesh of his cheeks to quiver in its intensity. If that suave and winsome cavalier with the white teeth, the laughing eyes, and the curled moustache, had been present at that moment, the savage hatred of this man would surely have been strong enough to burst the fetters that held him, that he might have strangled him then and there!

Ethel was shocked and mystified. She had not realised fully what the robber meant. Jacob Benson smiled grimly. He understood and knew that his own suspicions were now more than confirmed.

"What has Red Pedro to do with Don Antonio de Diaz?" asked Jacob, for Ethel's sake.

"They are one and the same man," said the brigand; "and the devil De Diaz will drag the chief Red Pedro down, down to hell! Would that these hands might send him there!"

Then the damning truth broke fully on the astounded maiden's mind. She turned deathly pale, and feared that she should swoon as she realised the horror of the fate which had all but befallen her.

"Courage! Miss Ethel," said her faithful servant. "Courage and trust! You never needed 'em more than now. We shall foil him by the help of Heaven!"

Again her peril came before her in the full measure of its truth, but all her womanhood came also to her aid.

Snatching the dagger from the hand of Jacob she hid it in her bosom, and one glance at her face the while was enough to convince the gamekeeper that she would sheathe it, if need be, in her own pure breast.

"We also have cause to hate that man," said Jacob, for he had already thought how this man might be enlisted in their service.

Further conversation revealed the explanation of the deserter's rage against the chief whom he had served so loyally. Don Antonio had in his reckless pursuit of selfish gratification accomplished the ruin of the sister of the fettered brigand by subtle deception and audacious lies. The poor girl had discovered who he really was and had died by her own hand, bequeathing her revenge to her brother, who now lay captive at Jacob's feet. The robber had only just discovered the identity of the handsome and sensual cavalier with his own captain, and had left the robber camp for ever. His one purpose now was to cherish his deadly hate and to glut his vengeance by plunging a dagger to the heart of the vile betrayer who had wrecked his sister's life.

When the pith of this revelation was translated for Ethel's benefit, that young lady could not help evincing a measure of pity for and sympathy with the hot-blooded Southron in the foul wrong which had gotten such a hold upon his spirit, and this the robber was not slow to see. It aided materially in smoothing the negotiations which were to follow. He informed them that a rich "Inglese" was detained for ransom in the robber camp, together with another prisoner, a Cuban landowner of large wealth, that both of them were under the charge of Blackbeard, for whom also, for some unmentioned reason, the robber had a great dislike. He told them that both these men were to be shot on the return of Red Pedro, as the days of grace for the production of their ransom were nearly over.

For a few moments Jacob and Ethel conferred together, and their captive was evidently trying to read in Ethel's face the while, what might be his own fate. He read nothing there, however, than pity and a look of hope. Then Jacob asked him whether it was possible to rescue these two men, for Ethel, in the natural kindness of her heart, had linked the two together; and whether, as he was so thoroughly familiar with the arrangements of the camp, he would undertake the task. The man intimated that it could be done, but only by himself, or some other individual acquainted with the character of Blackbeard and the discipline of the place.

"Bring those two men here," said Jacob, speaking slowly, "and I will pay you down one thousand pounds in English gold."

The mention of so large a sum made the listener's eyes to flash with another light. It was necessity, not choice, which had led the deserting brigand to ply his ill craft on Ethel and her companion. He did not intend to follow his criminal profession any more, certainly not until Red Pedro had fallen beneath his sharp steel blade, and this not because of any honest qualms of conscience, but because it might cause him to forfeit his liberty and so interfere with his revenge. In Jacob's offer he saw all his wants supplied and competence into the bargain.

"Will you undertake the task?" said the gamekeeper.

"Yes," said the robber, promptly and eagerly, "for gold and for revenge."

Both Jacob and Ethel too, though she did not understand his answer, knew by the tone in which it was delivered that he meant fully what he said.

Jacob unbound his prisoner, but prudently kept the pistol in his own possession for the present, and they proceeded along the mountain path in the direction of the village. At the outskirts of it and at a point where a narrow way struck off into the forest, the robber paused and said—

"I must not go further if I am to earn your reward. Red Pedro has men enough about here to quickly end my life if suspicion is aroused. Besides, there is no time to lose, for the troop sets out on an expedition to-night, and it is on their absence and upon the time of their departure that my scheme depends for its success. You can give me back my weapons now. I go to set the señor Inglese at liberty."

"And I," said Jacob, "will come and wait and watch by the waterfall. At the sight of the two prisoners the gold is yours."

So saying he returned his pistol, but the man still remained standing with outstretched hand. Jacob looked surprised.

"My stiletto," said the man, "I may need it, for if bad fortune puts me in their hands, my dagger and not their bullets will set me free."

Until that moment Ethel had forgotten that she had hid the weapon in her own bosom, and she now drew it forth with a hot blush at her own temerity. The first shock of fear and feeling on learning the treachery of De Diaz had passed away, and she was glad to get the murderous little weapon out of her custody.

The knife was replaced in the Spaniard's girdle, a few coins were placed in his hands as earnest money, and with a low bow to Ethel, the bandit turned aside and took the forest way.

"It's all right, Miss," said Jacob, as they returned to their quarters in the village. "I can read a Spaniard as well as here and there one, seeing that I've knocked about a good deal among them: and I know that we may trust this one; not because he's particular trustworthy in hisself, but because, as he says, he will gain by it both revenge and gold. It's capital!" continued Jacob, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "This is the ferret, and we'll get the rabbit as sure as Saturday."

Ethel did not inquire of her trusty henchman whether the

'rabbit' he referred to was her brother, the captive heir of Aspen Chase; neither did she solicit an explanation of the problem as to why Saturday was more sure than any other day in the week. Her mind was full of thought, and she trod the village street in anxious wonderment as to how these things would end. She felt a positive horror at the thought of Red Pedro's return; but hoped that, as he himself had mentioned three days, the bandit's work might be completed, so that when the unscrupulous brigand chief did return he might find that all the birds were flown. Her greatest stay and comfort was that she thought she could see an overruling Providence at work, and she believed that all things, however strange and unpromising they might appear, were working for good and bringing on the hour of deliverance and success. Finding an early opportunity to retire to her chamber, she again commended her brother and herself to the care of Him who had so clearly heard her prayers and answered them in days gone by.



CHAPTER XXVII.

SAM VAUSE THE BLACKSMITH INDULGES IN A RIDE; AND PETER PROUT THE MILLER RAISES A HOT DISCUSSION.

"Back and side go bare, go bare,
Both foot and hand go cold;
But belly, God send thee good ale enough,
Whether it be new or old."

Gammer Turton's Needle.

WE must now retrace our steps a little, and make another visit to peaceful and beautiful Aspendale, still peaceful and always beautiful, whatever of unrest or misdoing might be felt or wrought by those who had been accustomed to call it home. It was a bright winter's morning. A little snow had fallen in the night, and had been succeeded by just so much frost as served to keep it crystallised. There was just enough of it to cover the roads and pathways, but not enough to hide the grass in field and paddock in which the green blades peeped through the white 'top-dressing' as if resolved upon feeling and seeing as much as possible of the distant winter sun. There was just enough of it to powder the thatch upon the cottages of Thorpe Asper, but not enough to do more than whiten the furrows between the ridges of such genteeler roofs as could boast the respectability of tiles. There was

just enough of it to retain half footprints of passing pedestrians, but not enough to make walking anything other than pleasant and invigorating. There was just enough, too, to sprinkle tree and hedgerow with a fringe of winter garniture, but not enough to prevent the blackbird and the mavis and the linnet from perching thereon and trilling their morning matins on the sun.

The sun shone clearly if coldly, and its bright rays, reflected on and refracted by the snow-crystal, frozen or still trembling dewdrop or mimic icicle, made field and hedge and tree and even path and roadway to be strewn with glistening gems whose changing flash and fantastic sparkles everywhere met the delighted and admiring eye. The air was bright and clear and bracing, so much so that after Tim Crouch the cobbler had discussed his morning coffee, fried rasher and sweet home-made bread, he could not for the life of him settle down contented at his cobbler's bench. The brave bright sun shone on him through the window, illuming and glorifying with strange beauty the phantasies which Jack Frost had drawn upon the panes, and wooing him to come forth and take the 'goods the gods provided' on such a morn as this.

Tim could not resist the strong temptation. The lapstone soon became too heavy for his knee; the sharp bright awl and wax end were laid aside; the 'clamps' with a new upper-leather held firm within their grip were set up in the customary corner when Tim's 'hand was not in,' and the round-faced hammer, whose short handle lay reproachfully near his foot, was kicked under the bench disgraced and discredited by over-familiarity. Then the yielding Tim doffed his leather apron by withdrawing his bullet-head from its noose, donned his fustian jacket over his sleeve waistcoat, set his low chimney pot hat, which was much the worse for wear, jauntily on one side of his cropped head, lit up his short black pipe, and marched out

of the shop door, leaving Sallie in sole charge of the establishment.

Thrifty Sallie did not half like the look of things. She had a notion that Tim had the intention of making a day of it. It was not at all, alas, an unusual thing with him, and sadly often resulted in his making a night of it, too. Then in the small hours of the morning he would inform any wakeful villager within hearing, in tones confused and tipsily melancholy, that he would not go home till morning, until daylight did appear; a ditty which usually came to an ignominous end, when Sallie opened the door, gave tongue, and discharged her artillery on her beery and misbehaving spouse. So Sallie was not at all disposed to let him go without first giving him a bit of her mind.

"Ah' spooase, ah mun expect yo' back ageean when yo' cum, an' ah sall knoa' you've cum when ah clap 'ees o' yo'."

"Hod thee gammon," replied Tim in terms far more expressive than polite. "Ah sall be back direc'ly. Ah nobbut want to gan an' stritch me legs a bit. A mornin' like this wad mak' an aud craw sing 'Bonnits o' blue.'"

"Thoo'll leeak blue aneeaf i' t' mornin' ah'll bet a ho'p'ny. Stritch thee legs! Ah'll warrant thoo'll stritch 'em all t' way te t' 'Chequers;' an' then thoo'll stritch thee legs under t' lang teeable, afoore a pot o' ninep'ny: and there thoo'll stop till thee munny's deean; an' then Lan'lord Middledick 'll tell thee te stritch 'em yam ageean. Hoo thoo'll manage that, ah deean't knoa."

Sally Crouch had a tongue with a keen edge on it, and Tim felt it cut deep. If the cobbler had been on his bench just then, there is little doubt that he would have seized lapstone and hammer, and by means of a little vigorous lapstone logic would have beaten her out of the field. In this case, however, and seeing that he was already beyond the threshold, Tim thought discretion was the better part of valour, so he strode off at full speed.

Sallie could not refrain from giving her intractable spouse a parting shot. She shouted after him—

"Sall ah send a wheel barra' fo' tha', or mun t' cun-stubble get Chivey Ste'enson to help him to carry tha' yam te t' tune o' t' frog's march?"

Then she set to work to adjust the shop shutter, table fashion, hoping to make a few coppers' profit from her varied stock-in-trade, though she well knew that all she could do in that way would be a poor set-off against the serious *per contra* that was likely to go down Tim's thirsty throat.

At the door of his blacksmith shop stood Sam Vause listlessly leaning against the jamb with folded arms, as though he too had rebelled against the tyranny of the hammer, incited thereto by the bright sun that shone full on his red face, and played upon the white-washed walls of his shop, on which some score or two of horse-shoes were suspended ready for use should any farm horse require a new covering to its naked hoof. I am afraid the bibulous blacksmith was really on the look-out for somebody to provide him an excuse for wanting a pint of beer.

"Mornin', Sam," said the cobbler, drawing near. "Here's a mornin'! It's aneeaf te mak' a cripple gan off on a walkin' match."

"Mornin', Tim. It's a reg'lar stunner. It's aneeaf te mak' me gan off on a runnin' match. Only there's naebody to run wiv."

"Ah deean't mind challingin' tha' tiv' a race as far as t' Chequers," said Tim with a laugh.

"Dun!" said the blacksmith, nothing loth. He was quite ready either to run, or walk, or creep, or roll in that particular direction. "Dun! An' 'im 'at losses sall stand a pot o' ninep'ny. Is't a bargain?"

Carefully and ceremoniously Tim drew a line across the road with the side of his boot sole. The ill-matched pair,

for Tim was short and wiry, the blacksmith was tall and stout,—toed the line. "Now then," said Tim, and away they went along the snow-powdered road at a swinging pace, far less intent on victory than on reaching the spot where the creaking sign of the 'Chequers' would bring them up, to taste the sweet delights of the pewter mug with its 'brown October' and its cap of froth.

Sam Vause's more constant devotion to the beer-barrel had robbed him of his stamina and staying power in proportion as it had increased his girth, and consequently he soon gave evident signs that he was being blown. He gradually fell behind, and then came to him the thought that he should have to pay the victor for his beer. It so happened that a small drove of young cattle was being driven by a farm lad to the Chilworth market, and lazily blocked the road. A bright thought struck the blacksmith. He saw a chance to snatch the victory, which otherwise would be sure to fall to the lithe and wiry Tim.

With a skip and a jump Sam laid his hands on one of the hindmost bullocks and leaping on its haunches scared his strange steed into a headlong rush. Forcing its way through the herd, the young bullock sped along the highway bearing its panting rider into a position far in advance of his astonished comrade, who suddenly pulled up and shouted that the bet was off. Of course the blacksmith arrived first at the goal, but as his odd Rosinante had no desire for beer, he was borne, like John Gilpin, farther than he intended, and was likely enough to be carried into Chilworth market, where his advent would undoubtedly have made a great sensation. Thoroughly alarmed at the prospect of missing the 'ninepenny,' Sam was either unable or unwilling to retain his seat, so he 'came a cropper,' and was landed upon mother earth with a bump that reminded him of his own sledge hammer, even to the vision of stars which that instrument when brought

into sharp contact with hot iron could effectually produce. Sam slowly picked himself up, sympathetically rubbed the upper and nether portions of his physical frame, and limped back to the Chequers, where he was greeted by the uproarious laughter of an assembled group of spectators of his famous ride, and where he sought to soothe his sores and comfort his shaken body by a double pull at the pewter jug.

Amongst the little company at the Chequers, Sam found not only cobbler Tim, who charged him with having won a fraudulent success, but Chivey Ste'enson the poacher, who had just returned from a contraband sale of game at Chilworth, where a 'receiver,' name unknown, was in the habit of purchasing the results of his nocturnal excursions in the woods and fields of Aspendale. The gossippy miller, Peter Prout, was present, too, whose cart, checked in its progress on a cadging tour, was standing at the door. When the party, in company with Hepton Middledick the landlord, were disposed comfortably by the kitchen fire, the miller drew from the pocket of his meal-besprinkled jacket a copy of the *Popular Reader*, a good deal thumbed and worn with use.

"Diz ony o' yo' knoa a chap called Ralph Ravensworth?" said he, spreading the limp sheet upon the table. "Ah've niver heeard on him mysen', but he knoas all aboot Thorpe Aspen, ah reckon, or he niver could ha' written this here."

Straightway the miller read aloud a short story called "A Last Peep at the Old Home." It was the story of a young man who had broken the laws of his country, and who in his desperate love for his old home had ventured to visit it by stealth after nightfall. It told of his stolen peep through the window; of his heart-sickness and sorrow as he gazed on his mother's mournful face and silver hair; of his high resolves to lead a better life in a foreign land; of his discovery by a gamekeeper, so that he had to run for

fear of discovery; and of his imaginary peril from a poacher as he was fleeing through the night. The story gave a most life-like picture of the scenery of Aspendale, and especially of Aspen Garth. Before Peter had finished, Chivey Ste'enson exclaimed with an oath—

"That farm's Aspen Garth, an' that gamekeeper's Jake Benson. It's 'is varry pictur'."

Then suddenly recollecting his own sudden meeting with Alfred Atheling, and his kindly meant though excessively stinging remark to that young outlaw, he said no more, unwilling to do other than keep the young man's secret. It was needless, however, for shrewd Peter Prout was ready to announce his own conclusions.

"Ah was sure on't," said he. "That's why ah browt it wi' ma'. Them 'at can put this an' that tegither, can mak' it as sartan as dayleet 'at Ralph Ravensworth is only another neeam for Alf. Atheling, an' that young shaver's been doon te Thorpe Aspen as sure as eggs is eggs."

It will be remembered that Jacob Benson had taken Tim Crouch into his confidence as to that night's adventure, and so the cobbler had no difficulty in making up his mind as to the fact that the miller was right in his surmise. Tim scratched his head in silence. Ordinarily he would have expressed his opinion in dogmatic terms and with the confidence that cobblers usually have in the truth and justice of their opinions. But he remembered that it was by his own advice that Jacob Benson had kept the matter in the dark, and that they had both agreed that out of sympathy with Alfred and respect for the Widow Atheling they should say no word upon the subject. In Jacob Benson's absence Tim felt himself in a measure the custodian of Alfred's interests, and that it was his duty to throw the miller off the scent. The last they had heard of Alfred at Thorpe Aspen was that a reward had been offered for his apprehension, and Tim was resolved that so far as he was concerned the

money, "blood money" he called it, should never be earned by anybody in Aspendale. So he replied to the miller in a supercilious tone—

"Nut a bit on it. Alfred Atheling wad ha' niver been sitch a noodle as te give 'em sitch a clue as that. It isn't likely. Ah say, Chivey, did thoo iver knoa a hare stand up on its hinnd-legs 'an show its heead aboon its form an' squeeal, when thoo was prowlin' roond wi' thee gun?"

"Why, naw, that ah niver did," replied Chivey, willing enough to back the cobbler. "They've ower mitch respect for their oan fur for that. It wad be like me sayin', 'Dilly-dilly, cum an' be killed,' an' t' hare sayin', 'Ah's here, yo' can cum an' sattle ma' wi'thoot ony trubble.'"

"Exactly," responded Tim, "an' ah'll niver beleeave that young Alf. Atheling wad be softer than a silly hare. Nut a bit on it. There's other pairts o' t' cuntry 'at's like Thorpe Aspen, an' as for farm-steeads an' gamekeepers, they're as like yan another as two peas."

This was fairly good reasoning; but Peter Prout was not the man to give in, and so the dispute waxed hot. Landlord Middledick took sides with the miller, the poacher warmly supported the cobbler, and Sam Vause the blacksmith felt the question to be so knotty, that he called for another jug of beer to help in its solution. Of course by this potent aid the arguments on each side grew in fervency if not in force. A quarrel was impending, when Peter, who had a wholesome regard for a whole skin, and knew aforetime how ready Sam Vause was to have recourse to the 'last dread arbitrament of war,' arose and withdrew to prosecute his cadging tour.

At that moment Edgar Atheling happened to be riding past on his way to Chilworth market. Resolved to test his own opinion on the matter by an application to Alfred's brother, the miller took the journal from his pocket again, saying—

"Mornin', Mr. Edgar. Just cast your eye ower this, will yo'? It weean't tak' yo' two minutes."

Edgar took it in silence. He had no great love for Peter, whose gossipy tongue was difficult to silence; but as he read his face paled, then reddened; the hand that held the paper trembled; and the miller felt sure that a tear-drop was checked by the rapid movements of the lashes of his eye.

"Lend me this for to-day, miller. I'm late for market," he said, and rode off without another word.

"There! didn't ah tell yo'?" said Peter to his comrades, speaking through the window.

Tim Crouch had been a keen observer. He was very wroth with the miller, and as the meddlesome knight of the meal-sack drove off in his rumbling cart, the cobbler shook his fist after him, and said with a knowing sort of nod—

"All right, Maister Meeally-feeace, ah'll hev' it oot wi' tha' for that."



CHAPTER XXVIII.

CLARA ATHELING TAKES THE BARONET IN CHARGE; AND SIMON HOLMES SPENDS AN EVENING AT ASPEN GARTH.

"Through this dark and stormy night,
Faith beholds a feeble light
Up the blackness streaking;
Knowing God's own time is best,
In a patient hope I rest,
For the full day-breaking!"

Whittier.

WHEN Ethel Spofforth had fairly come to the conclusion that she must follow the call of duty and go in quest of her absent brother, she had prevailed upon her friend and companion, Clara Atheling, to undertake the charge of Sir Godwin during what she hoped and believed would prove a brief absence from home. The two families had had friendly relations with each other for several generations, and on more than one occasion they had been brought into closer bonds than that of mere neighbourly friendship by intermarriage. The Widow Atheling, physically hale and capable despite her griefs, was quite able to conduct the management of affairs at Aspen Garth, and she was altogether willing that Clara should take the place of her sweet friend, and do her

best to make Ethel's absence as light as possible to the invalid baronet.

Clara's task proved to be altogether lighter and more enjoyable than she expected, thanks to the great change which had come over Sir Godwin from the day that Simon Holmes had been the means of leading him to the Light. A quite unusual gentleness of spirit and softness of manner had come to him; and the fretfulness and sharp and sudden fits of peevish anger which are so often superinduced by the sad affliction which had reduced the baronet to such a condition of physical helplessness, though they had not altogether disappeared, were held in check by the new strength he had received, the help 'that cometh from above.'

Clara was touched exceedingly by the patient hope with which the father awaited the return of his beloved daughter. Never had he known before how much he loved her, how much he relied upon her strength of love and her clear judgment of what was right and good. Sir Godwin had always felt a true regard for Ethel's friend, but now that she was under his roof continually, and seemed to feel as great a joy as he in conversing about his absent girl, and in speaking hopefully and firmly of her success in her important errand, he felt more than ever drawn to her, and silently pictured to himself so worthy and engaging a maiden as the future mistress of Aspen Towers. There had been a time when he had nursed the hope of securing for Harold a proud alliance with rank and wealth, but now, thanks to the sharp discipline of life and the clearer views of things that had dawned upon him, he felt of how much less value such things were, as compared with 'all the virtues native born and heaven sent which make that treasure, a good and noble woman.' One day, after the conversation had turned for some length of time on the subject nearest to his heart, the baronet said—

"It is very selfish of me to keep you talking and listening about my own anxieties and hopes. Have you any further intelligence concerning your brother Alfred? I trust and pray that your sad probation at Aspen Garth will end soon, and that Robert will return as, please God, Ethel will, to tell of good success."

"Thank you, Sir Godwin," said Clara, while the tears stood in her bright eyes. "I have faith in God for that too. Brother Robert will never give up seeking till he find him. You know what dear father said upon his deathbed to my dear mother: 'All will be well with you and your youngest born. Alfred will come home to Thorpe Aspen and to his father's God.' Every night, when Edgar reaches down the old Family Bible, and either he or mother offers the household prayer, we always repeat the words. It seems as though they have become almost a part of Scripture, and it seems as much an article of faith with us as that dear father is himself in heaven, and that we are on the way to meet him there. 'We shall meet again,' dear father said, 'an unbroken family in heaven.' Sometimes we got a little downhearted when Robert kept writing of his non-success; but since he has told us of the strange way in which he found Ned Saltmer, and so got lodgings in the very rooms that poor Alfred had just left, it has seemed to us more clear than ever that God's hand is in it, and so we hope and wait. Dear old Joss!" continued Clara with a little quaver in her voice, "even the collie is enlisted on our behalf. It was not for nothing that Robert could not leave his dog behind."

On another occasion, Sir Godwin asked her to read to him from a periodical that had come to him by post. Amongst the rest of the articles was one concerning an instance of simple faith in God on the part of suffering feebleness, and of God's strengthening and delivering hand.

"That is very, very beautiful," said the baronet, when

she had finished. "Nobody could write that who had not been chastened and taught by a like experience. Who is it by?"

"It is signed 'Ralph Ravensworth,'" said Clara. "We have often lately noticed his name at the Garth. Mother says that he has a wonderful power of speaking to the heart."

A mother's heart and a son's heart! No wonder that to her the language was eloquent of love.

There came to Aspen Garth, on one never never-to-be-forgotten day, that letter from Robert Atheling which told how he had clearly proved that his brother Alfred had not stolen the money entrusted to him by his employer. It did not free the youth from blame, much blame for sad wrong-doing, but it did lift off the damning blot that, had it really blotched his reputation, he must have borne the life-long brand, a felon and a thief! On that day a twofold revelation came to Aspen Garth, for that same evening it was that Edgar returned from Chilworth market with the miller's copy of the *Popular Reader* in his pocket.

After Sir Godwin had retired to rest at his usually very early hour, Clara was at liberty to run home for awhile and spend an hour or two with her mother and brother in the dear old-fashioned ingle, dear to her above all places in the world besides. She found them all in a strangely melting mood, for on the table beside Edgar lay the *Popular Reader* open at the page containing the little sketch, 'A Last Look at the Old Home,' which he had just been reading aloud. Her mother was seated by the fire, her eyes red with the record of recent tears. In the opposite corner sat Simon Holmes, and it was clear by the way in which he used his big coloured pocket handkerchief, and the stress of his attempts to appear the victim of a severe cold, that the old carpenter was hard bestead to prevent himself from weeping outright.

"What is the matter, mother?" said Clara after receiving her kiss of welcome. "Is there any news from Robert?"

Robert and his search were always uppermost in their minds, first subject always of their hopes and fears.

"Two things are the matter, Clara," said Edgar, smiling on his sister. "Robert has proved it clear as daylight that the loss of Mr. Harvey's money was an act of carelessness and not of theft. Of that sin and shame your brother's name and fame stands clear. Second, we have found out who Ralph Ravensworth is. Read that!"

Clara had not read a dozen paragraphs before her vision was made clear.

"O Alfred, Alfred!" she exclaimed. "My brother Alfred!" And those tears, whose fount is in the heart more than in the eyes, told how the tender plaintive story had gone home.

"Where is he now?" That question of deepest import was asked by his mother, who yearned with unmeasured desire to have the erring, but evidently penitent lad by her side. "And why does he not write a line to say at anyrate that he repents?" she continued, more inclined to rebel just now than at any time before. She wanted so much to lay her hand upon his head and bless her son. How could she know that he had sailed with the intention of writing from the other side of the Atlantic! How should she know that he was then but just rescued from the fate of a castaway at sea!

Then came to the rescue worthy, wise, and ever helpful Simon Holmes.

"Wheriver he is," said the carpenter, "we knoa noo, wheer his heart is. *That's* cum home alriddy; an' efter all it's t' main pairt on him; an' wheer his heart is, the lad hissen is sure te follow. What strikes me mooast is hoo clearly the Providence o' God is managin' matters, bit by bit. Fost, He mak's Joss go to Lundon i' spite of his

maister, sae that he may rickollect my owd jonnamen when he sees him. Then He puts Robert in t' varry hoose 'at Alfred lived in. Then He manages that your varry oan corn marchant should finnd t' missin' money. Then He sends you a few special drops o' balsam i' t' form o' this magazine, an' mak's Peter Prout, 'at isn't mitch gi'en that way, to drop 'em in. Ivery thing's goin' on all right an' reg'lar, an' sum o' theease days, it'll be a case o' 'lang leeaked for, come at last.' I can't help thinkin' o' this point, Mrs. Atheling, that as you sit there this minnit, there's one tremendous difference between t' state o' things noo, an' what they've iver been befoore, since t' trubble aboot Maister Alfred com' te yo.' He's proved by Mr. Robert te be innocent o' brekkin' t' law, an' he's proved by his oan writin's that whativer he hez been, his heart's warm te his mother an' his home, an' gives indications 'at it's warmin' te his God. It seeams te me that this mornin' afoore t' posst com' in you were all drinkin' the watters o' Marah, bitter an' brackish beyond degree. Noo the good Lord's tossed a wonderful healin' tree intiv it, an' you've gotten a sweeter teeaste i' your mouths then you've had for monny and monny a dark an' cloody day. Surely you may ha' fayth te beleeave that God 'll go on te be gracious, an' that by-an'-by you'll sit amang the palm trees an' the wells of Elim, here in your oan ingle-nook wi' Mr. Robert an' Mr. Alfred at your side. The Wonder-worker that did this for yo' can do t' other."

"So He can, Simon, and under the influence of your cheering words, I feel as though I cannot help believing that He will," said Mrs. Atheling.

"The Lord hez a good monny healin' trees at His disposal," continued Simon, "an' He hez a way o' puttin' Elim patches o' green i' all sorts o' unexpected spots as we go travellin' on. I couldn't help thinkin' o' this as soon as Mr. Edgar tell'd me t' good news, an' I felt as though I must put doon my thowts i' rhyme."

Here Simon put his hand to the breast pocket of his jacket, and was greeted by Clara with the remark—

"O Simon! let us hear it, please." The quick-witted girl knew well enough that Simon was more than willing, but she knew also that such a request would help his native modesty and put him more at his ease. Nothing loth, therefore, Simon read as follows:—

THROUGH MARAH TO ELIM.

Barred by ocean's rolling waves,
Tracked by Egypt's vengeful braves,
Girt by mountains broad and high,
Surely Israel's host must die!
With such peril none may cope,
Israel sorrows without hope.

Trembling, fearing, Israel stands;
Shout in triumph Pharaoh's bands.
Then in sight of Egypt's host,
Lo, the sea is safely crossed!
Sound the timbrel loud and long!
Israel sings a joyful song.

Under heaven's glowing arch
Weary Israel on the march,
Droops and faints and struggles on,
Strength and hope and patience gone.
"Water! water!" None is nigh!
Israel weeps, and can but die.

Lo, the vanguard sees the light
Shimmering on the waters bright!
"WATER!" glad and loud and clear,
Rings the cry from front to rear.
Onward eagerly they plod,
Israel hopes, and trusts in God.

Kneeling on the fringing sand,
Pitcher, cup, or scooping hand

Each into the lakelet dips,
Lifts the water to his lips.
"Bitter!" "Brackish!" wailing cry!
Israel fainting, needs must die!

Stunned by stroke of painful rod,
Cries to Heaven the man of God.
There Jehovah—who but He?—
Points him to the healing tree;
Makes the water sweet and good.
Israel shouts its gratitude.

Blessed, refreshed, and strengthened now,
Israel sings, and wonders how
Faith should ever fail at need;
Israel's Lord is God indeed!
Onward press they, heart and soul—
Israel hastens to the goal.

Grateful shade at Elim spread!
Israel on that verdant bed
Rests in peace, and gladly dwells
For a season by its wells;
'Neath the overspreading palms
Israel chants its grateful psalms.

Ever better than their fears,
True and faithful, God appears;
Tests their trust by each alarm,
Rescues with His mighty arm;
Brings a blessing richer yet!
Israel! do not thou forget!

All along the changeful line,
He, the Changeless, still is thine!
Red Sea danger, desert drought,
Brackish Marah!—never doubt,
All shall bring thy Canaan near;
Israel! Israel! Never fear!

The little party at Aspen Garth listened in silence and were instructed and encouraged. Warm thanks were freely

tendered to the old carpenter for his most suggestive and heart-cheering lines. At the widow's request Simon led their evening devotions, and poured his soul in gratitude for that day's glad discoveries; and for the still undiscovered wanderer, that he might soon return to receive the loving welcome that was waiting for him there, and every kneeling soul gave heart-sanction to his strong petitions by their low 'Amen!'

Little did they know, that little group at Aspen Garth, how near to them Alfred Atheling was just then: 'So near and yet so far.' Before we enter on that matter, however, we must hasten back to town to see how it fares with Robert, to follow the fortunes of the rescued castaway, and to lift the veil on Harold Spofforth, waiting his doom in the bandit's lair.





CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MAIDEN INEZ SORROWS OVER A PROSPECTIVE LOSS; AND ALFRED ATHELING IS TAKEN CAPTIVE BY A PICTURE.

"But the hearth of home has a constant flame,
And pure as vestal fire,—
'Twill burn, 'twill burn for ever the same,
For nature feeds the pyre.
And there, like a star through midnight cloud,
I see the beacon bright;
For never till shining on my shroud
Can be quenched home's holy light."

Hale.

NO sooner did Alfred Atheling hear the anchor-chains rattle through the hause-holes of the *Good Intent* as the vessel hove to off Gravesend, than a full sense of his personal peril, exaggerated by his fears, broke upon him with overpowering force. He was once again in England! He who had fled from justice; he who was specially 'wanted' by Police Constable Tugwell, who would be only too glad to retrieve his former blunder by the recapture of his former prisoner; he for whose capture a reward was offered, was once again within the possible and probable grasp of the law he had offended! The word ABSCONDED! which he himself had read concerning himself in the 'Agony' columns of the daily papers, seemed to be

written in letters of fire on the cabin wall; and he felt impelled to leave the ship without an hour's delay. His fears and forebodings were deepened and intensified when the innocent Inez, noting his pale face and haggard features, laid her hand upon his arm and looked up at him with love-lighted eyes.

"O Mr. Ravensworth!" she said, in soft and winsome tones, "you are sad. Dear friend! tell me what it is?"

As she spoke the dark eyes of this fair daughter of the South were filled with tears, and there was that in her tones which revealed a secret which was not as yet understood by herself, nor recognised by her own young and gentle heart.

For one startled moment, Alfred was silent. Two things were made manifest to him at once. "She loves me," thought he: and then he thought how dearly he should delight to kiss those tears away. But the discovery distressed him exceedingly. He felt unspeakably sad, even while he felt how great would be his joy to hear such an avowal from her own sweet lips.

All that was best and manliest in Alfred Atheling now came uppermost and to the front. The sore discipline through which he had lately passed had been of infinite moral value to him, and he was sincerely alarmed and grieved at the knowledge unwittingly revealed to him that the maiden's heart was or might be his own. He had never thought to win her love: he had regarded her as little more than a child. She was young in years and had the appearance of being younger than she was. But like everything that belongs to the tropic region where the sun displays his regal power, the maiden rapidly approached the line which divides the girl from the woman, and Alfred was a youth of great personal attractions, and his behaviour through all the sad season of their dire distress had been such as was sure to win upon a trusting, sensitive, loving and grateful spirit as her own. Now that Alfred felt that such a prize was within

his reach, his cheeks tingled with honest shame. His heart throbbed with the feeling of his own unworthiness. He felt that he could not, ought not, dared not for one moment seek to ally his fortunes with those of the innocent and beautiful girl before him: could not, ought not, dared not seek to bind to her his own smirched reputation, and to give to her a name which he himself more than half-feared he could never wear again.

"It makes me so sad to see you sad," repeated Inez. "Father says that you had better go with us for a little while to our dear little home at Deal. You will soon pick up your health again down there, he says." And then she added with a little sigh, "I know that it has been your great care and trouble for poor me that has made you so unwell. I *would* try to help you to get well again. You will go with us, won't you?"

Then she has been speaking with her father for this, thought Alfred to himself, and found herein another proof that she would fain keep him at her side. It was a subtle and strong temptation. Not only in that he should still be near her, still be within sound of her voice, and still see the love-glance in her eye, but that it might well afford him shelter and safety from the peril that he feared. Gladly, eagerly would he have said 'Yes' to so fair a pleader, and at the prospect of having such a nurse, but he felt that it must not be.

"No, Inez," he said, kindly and gently. "Some day I may come to Deal and see you both, and talk over our strange experiences at sea; but I must get on shore at once and—and—"

"Yes, I know," she answered with a sigh. "Your friends will be very anxious about you. I do not wonder at your wishing to go. I suppose you ought to; but it will be very sad for us to say good-bye, and not to know—"

It was a very fortunate thing, for many reasons, that

Captain Lanyon's approach cut short the conversation, for Alfred Atheling was impulsive and the strain was great.

"How long are we likely to stay here, think you, Captain Lanyon?" said Alfred.

"I fancy the skipper will wait the arrival of his employer, Ephraim Hartgold, who, he says, 'has a knack of minding his own business, especially where his ships are concerned.' I shall be glad to see him myself. There would be some real satisfaction in getting into his employ. But what about yourself? I've been telling Inez that a fortnight at Deal would help to bring the colour into your cheeks again. I need not tell you what pleasure it would give to us."

Alfred saw how Inez seconded the appeal and endorsed the statement with an expressive glance of her 'eloquent dark eyes.' But he held firm by his resolves, and explained to Captain Lanyon that as his plans had been so thoroughly broken in upon by the wreck of the *Boadicea*, it was simply essential for him to attend to his own affairs.

Now Alfred Atheling felt an instinctive indisposition to meet the Quaker merchant, who was hourly expected to board the *Good Intent*. Whether he remembered the name in connection with the grain grown on the fields of Aspen Garth, or whether he simply dreaded to meet with one who had been in England all the time of his own absence, and who might therefore be supposed to be conversant with the continued 'hue and cry' which he did not doubt would be made for himself, I cannot say. He resolved to take the first opportunity of leaving the ship, and so get out of the way alike of peril and temptation, and once more do battle with his secret trouble and carry his heavy burden alone. The opportunity came sooner than he hoped for. A boat which had brought fresh provisions for the ship was available for his purpose. Taking a last farewell look at the maiden who had so silently and unwittingly crept into his heart, he quietly waited his time, dropped into the boat unobserved

by any of the three whose notice it was necessary to elude; and in the shadows of the evening he was put on shore.

Alfred's first impulse was to make his way direct to the well-remembered cottage of his good friends Ned Saltmer and his excellent 'spouse Nancy.' He felt well assured that they would gladly give him shelter for awhile until he could again replenish his purse, and embark a second time to cross the Atlantic and find a sure haven from his perils beyond the sea. Had he done so, there is little doubt that his wanderings would have come to a sudden and perpetual end. He had managed, when he left the sinking *Boadicea*, to secure his little store of money, the literary earnings of Ralph Ravensworth, so that he was not without resources. He took an early train to town, and then turned his face in the direction of Woodstock Street, in the neighbourhood of Victoria Park.

It is wonderful what small events and apparently insignificant incidents are sufficient to turn and curve the pathway of our pilgrim life, so that it leads altogether away from the pilgrim's original plans and first desires, and gives to his experiences an unanticipated loss or gain. Passing along the London streets. Alfred perceived a group of people looking with evident interest into the window of a large shop well-lit with gas, and he must needs turn aside in curiosity to see on what their eyes were looking. There was a large picture of a battle scene, an engagement of English troops, which some little while before had been the subject of high laudation. It had excited much admiration while it hung on the walls of the Royal Academy, and was now subjected, previous to engraving, to the popular gaze.

Alfred Atheling had no taste just then for that kind of art, and after a very brief inspection he was already turning to elbow his way through the clustering sightseers, when another picture, hanging on the side of the window, and of altogether a different kind, caught his lingering eye. It

caught his attention, and held it with a spell as powerful as that with which the fabled magicians were wont to root the feet of luckless mortals to the ground. It was a remarkably well-painted landscape, and Alfred recognised at once the beautiful valley of Aspendale. Closer inspection revealed to him the fact, that on the right of the picture there was an exact representation of the queer old gables and steep tiled roof and ivy covered walls of Aspen Garth.

This unexpected vision riveted the wanderer's gaze, and for a moment the picture disappeared from view blurred by the mist of tears that filled his eyes. It produced in him sensations that cannot be described. He saw the very window with its diamond panes through which he had stolen a last long look on that former never-to-be-forgotten night when he was about to flee his native land for ever. He found himself flattening his nose against the big plate-glass window of the shop, in the fond hope that he could find some shadowy presentment of his mother there.

"O mother! mother!" he murmured, "would to God that I might look upon you once again!"

And now another spell was on him. That was the spell that casts its enchantments round a soul familiar from infancy with the delicious necromancy of a mother's love, and the fascinating glamour of a happy home. As eagerly as he had watched at sea through the long hours of peril for a friendly sail, did he hunger now for the sound of his mother's voice and another look at the hallowed spot so full of the tender memories of 'auld lang syne.'

Home and mother! Potent words. East or west, home is best, says the racy, rhyming old Saxon saw. The reek of my ain hame is better than the fire of another's, tells us how the Scotchman values his ingle-nook; and the Spaniard cries with true feeling, "Home! my own home! Tiny though thou be, to me thou seem'st an abbey." Washington Irving somewhere remarks, "It was the policy of the

good old couple to make their children feel that home was the happiest place on earth, and I value this delicious home feeling as one of the choicest gifts that a parent can bestow." That was what had made Alfred Atheling's home so dear to him now, and that is what parents everywhere who are wise and good will endeavour to make of theirs. Christianity itself was cradled in the family circle, and the Pattern Life was shaped and nurtured in the sacred atmosphere of a godly home. Those who have yielded to the sore temptations which assail the youth who has gone from such a pleasant wholesome harbour out into the world, and who seem to wander far, far from that central point of love and peace, will not fail to turn to its holy memories, and feel its gracious influences, when the forbidden pleasures pall that held them captive, or when the pain that follows them begets repentance and regret. There is an epitaph in a certain churchyard which runs thus, 'She always made home happy.' No mother need wish a fairer record. That answer was beautiful and true which was given by the little child when she was asked, Where is your *home? Where my mother is.* In the old feudal days of castles, moats, barons and armed retainers, a belief in magic was part and parcel of that mediæval state of things, and the magician's aid was oft invoked to keep the inmates of the castle safe. Never necromantic spell or wizard's wand of old could work the wonders which are wrought by the magic charms of a wise good wife and mother; and never subtler, stronger bonds were meshed by kindly fairy than the web woven round a household by a mother's love.

Alfred resigned himself to the potent charm without a struggle. Turning from the window, he resolved to find some quiet secluded hostel for the night, and to-morrow to take the train for Chilworth, and in the dim twilight to walk the familiar lane that led from Chilworth to Aspen

Garth, and steal another vision of that 'home, sweet home,' and that still more sweet, beloved mother, at whose feet he longed to kneel and on whose lap he longed to lay his weary head. As he sauntered along the crowded streets, indifferent to danger and oblivious to every passer-by, he murmured the poet's touching lines—

"Between broad fields of wheat and corn
Is the dear old home where I was born.
The peach-tree leans against the wall,
And the woodbine wanders over all.
There is the barn, and as of yore,
I can smell the hay from the open door,
And see the busy swallows throng,
And hear the peewits' mournful song;
Oh ye who daily cross the sill,
Step lightly, for I love it still!"

Poor Alfred Atheling! so he thought, as he moved along through the roaring streets of London Town, a stranger and a wanderer with a houseless feeling at his heart, and, because of his misdoings, with a price upon his head!

CHAPTER XXX.

ALFRED ATHELING TURNS HIS STEPS TO ASPENDALE; AND TIM CROUCH THE COBBLER "CHEATS THE NINEPENNY."

"And whatsoever else shall hap this night,
Give it an understanding but no tongue.

. . . . . .

If you have hitherto concealed this sight,
Let it be tenable in your silence still."

Shakespeare.

NOW it so happened that on the same evening that Alfred Atheling was trudging through the gathering shadows along the road between Chilworth and Thorp Aspen, Tim Crouch the cobbler, with his still more bibulous crony, Sam Vause the blacksmith, were making a day of it at the Chequers, where we last left them quaffing strong beer, and arguing with Miller Prout on the subject of 'Ralph Ravensworth's' identity. All through the day Tim had kept reverting to this subject, and was evidently nursing his grudge against the 'dusty fusty miller' for showing Edgar Atheling the tell-tale copy of the *Popular Reader*. When Tim got fairly hold of an idea he held to it with remarkable tenacity, and if he was in his cups when the idea came to it, that tenacity was even stronger than in his sober moments. Somehow, to-day, he had got the

notion well fixed in his mind that, in Jacob Benson's absence, he was the sole depository of Alfred's stolen visit to Aspen Garth, and was thereby constituted the guardian of Alfred and his interests in that region.

When the shades of evening began to gather round, Tim could not possibly, with any regard for truth, have sung 'We are na fou,' for he certainly was, but as certainly not so 'fou' as the blacksmith, who lay dead drunk under the kitchen table, fast asleep. There he would have to lie until such times as the constable or some capable customer should call to aid mine host in carrying him across the threshold. Then he would most likely lie upon the greensward for many an hour, and until he was able to keep somewhere near his perpendicular when once he again obtained it, and stagger home.

Tim Crouch was always moderately manageable when he was in his cups, and withal kept and even increased his cheerful turn of mind. So Landlord Middledick succeeded in persuading him to go home, which was right enough; seeing that all his money was gone, what further business had he there? So argued Boniface, and so, alas, do argue the majority of his tribe. Probably the landlord would not have succeeded so easily, but that he managed to make Tim believe that Sally was sure to bring a sharp personal summons to bear with a view to quicken his steps for him.

After some few ineffectual attempts to find his bearings and to make any headway at all, Tim staggered out into the night. He pursued a very devious track, for a long succession of draughts of Middledick's ninepenny had sadly interfered with his muscular control. He kept going in the main in a homeward direction, though he tried to sing the contradictory sentiment that he would not go home till morning, and till daylight did appear. His utterance was very thick, however, and it might well have stood for a

promise to his wife that he was coming home as fast as the difficulties under which he laboured would allow. Every now and then he stood still, swaying to and fro to this side and that in a gallant attempt to keep right end uppermost, and at such times would stretch his hand in oratoric attitude, and continue his discussion with an unknown and unseen adversary the question that had exercised him so much throughout the day: varying it a little occasionally, by sudden bursts of denunciation of Peter Prout, and working himself up into such pitches of wrath, that the miller might well congratulate himself that he was at that particular moment enjoying his pipe at his ain fireside.

Now Cobbler Tim was one of those wiry, hard-headed, firm-fibred sort of men who can manage to retain their native shrewdness amid their cups and hiccups. That matter about Ralph Ravensworth would keep buzzing through his brain. Every now and then he would stop his wholesale manufacture of the letter S along the highway, stretch his legs apart with a view to keep his balance fairly even, suspend his song, fold his arms, and saying—

"Noo, le' me see. It stan's like this," would proceed to argue with himself. "There's nae doot, nut as big as a midge, 'at R-raif R-a-ra—what yo' call'im's Alf Ath'ling. What o' that? What bus'ness is't o' theirs? They've no call te med'l we't! Drat that musty-dusty-fusty oad mil'r! Mis'r Alf'd's a jolly good fello'. All the Athl'ng's jolly good fello's. Three cheers for Mis'r Alfr'd. Hip, hip, hip, hurra!"

And so it came to pass that Alfred Atheling, who was walking with silent step on the grassy road side, was startled into a standstill to hear himself the subject of such undeserved and uproarious applause. His astonishment was materially increased by what followed. Now that Tim had relieved his feelings by his loud cheers, he began to re-

sume his homeward progress; but he kept harping on the subject—

"Iss, three cheers for Alfr'd Athl'ng. No, no—that's nut it. Le' 'im call hissen what he likes. Three cheers for Raif Athl'ng! No, that's nut it neeather. Le' me see! Three cheers for Alfr'd Ra-ra-vens—Bless me life! It's gotten tied up iv a knot. All right! Let it stay there. We won't go home till mornin'." And so Tim lapses into song again, and, like Gray's ploughman, 'homeward plods his weary way.'

For some moments, while busy Tim was talking in this confused and crooked way, Alfred felt himself bereft of the power to move. It was a surprising thing to hear his own name at all in such a fashion, but to hear his cherished shelter name so intimately mixed up with it was very strange indeed. He felt that he must have more information; that this mystery must be explained. Of course Alfred knew his man, for who was there within a dozen miles of Thorpe Aspen who was not thoroughly acquainted with Cobbler Tim?

Alfred felt himself to be secure against all chance of recognition. He was clad in a loose sailorly kind of suit, a sort of skipper's mufti, which he had purchased from Captain Crumpit. He had not been shaven since long before he left the shores of England in the *Boadicea*, and his face wore quite a remarkable crop of auburn hair for so young a man. Besides, as he argued to himself, Tim would look at him through beery spectacles, whose obfuscating powers were evidently very strong indeed, and would make security doubly sure. And then, in the improbable event of recognition, who would believe a cock-and-bull story from the lips of a witness so ready with the long-bow and withal so thoroughly under the influence of that forsworn word-twister, John Barleycorn? So he boldly strode up to the side of the merry cobbler, and said—

"Good evening, my friend, good evening. You are evidently having a good time of it?"

"Evenin'," said Tim, lowering his tones considerably, and steadying himself as well as he could to get a good look at the new comer. "Iss, ah've had a good tahme on it, as you say. It's a poor 'art 'at nivver rejoices. Le's drive dull care away, eh? Them's my sent'ments. What's yours?"

There is no doubt that those were Alfred's sentiments too, but, alas, he had no means of driving his care away, a care so heavy that he could say with Shelley—

> "I could lie down like a tired child,
> And weep away the life of care
> Which I have borne, and yet must bear."

All the reply he could make, however, was—

"Very good sentiments indeed, so long as one can manage to do it. You seem not to have had much trouble; how do you manage it?"

Tim gave the questioner an arch look, which showed clearly enough that he had still his wits about him, and was fully cognisant of his condition, as he replied—

"Middledick's ninep'ny. That's the preshkiption. It's a wonnerful brew. You're a stranger i' these pairts, ah fancy?"

"Yes," said Alfred, thinking how true and false the answer was. "I shall find some inn or other at Thorpe Aspen, I suppose?"

"No, yo' weeant," said Tim. "'Cos why? There isn't yan. You mun gan back te t' Chequers. Mid'le'dick's gotten good accommydation for travellers, an' as ah tell'd yo' just noo, his ninep'ny's wonnerfu' good. Stop," he continued, seeing, as he thought, another jug of it in prospect, "ah'll gan back wi' yo' an' show yo' t' way."

"Oh dear no," said Alfred hastily and thoughtlessly, for that would not do at all. "I'll go on with you. I expect I can get what I want at the Royal George."

Tim was a little bit surprised that his companion should not know that there was no inn in Thorpe Aspen, and should yet be familiar with the fact that there was a Royal George a mile beyond it. He was bent, however, on going back to the Chequers; and tried to lay his hand on Alfred's arm to check him. But Middledick's ninepenny had disarranged the focus of his vision, and his reach fell short. Tim stumbled and came to a collapse upon the ground.

"What did yo' push me doon for?" said Tim, as soon as he had regained a sitting position, looking at Alfred and speaking in an injured tone.

Alfred was so anxious to hear more concerning himself, that though he was at first inclined to leave him there, he coincided with Tim's way of putting it, with a view to keeping him in good humour.

"I didn't mean it," said he, lending him a helping hand.

"All right," said Tim, scrambling on his feet again. "It's all right. Ah'll say ne mair aboot it. You'll stan' a quart of ale?" And so saying he sought again to turn his companion's steps in the direction of the Chequers.

"Come along, Tim," said Alfred coaxingly, quite forgetting that he was a 'stranger' in his anxiety to keep the cobbler from parting company with him, and turning rusty on his hands, in which case he knew he should get but little information from him.

Tim put his arm within Alfred's uninvited, and with that substantial aid was able to get over the ground in a more satisfactory way. But he had not much to say. The fact was shrewd Tim was thinking, and this was how his thoughts ran:—This is queer, thought he. He's a 'stranger,' yet he knows the Royal George! He's quite a stranger, and yet he calls me Tim!

It might have been Alfred who was worse for liquor, for, as if to help Tim to come to a right conclusion, he said—

"I heard you saying something about the Athelings just now. Do they live in this neighbourhood?"

"Iss," answered Tim, looking furtively at his companion, "They live at Aspen Garth. Jolly good fello's all on' 'em; specially Mis'r Robert, an' Mis'r Edgar, an' Mis'r Alfred, an' Missus an' Miss Clara, specially, all on' em."

I am strongly inclined to believe that this Irish way of putting it was 'with intention,' as the French say, and that after all Tim was not so drunk as he looked. At any rate, he proceeded to say—

"Mis'r Alfred's jolly good fello', but he's unfo't'nat'. De yo' knoa owt aboot 'im?"

If Alfred had known what was passing in the speaker's mind he would have hesitated to make reply.

"I've known a little of him, but not much good any way," he said, and could not help sighing to think how true it was.

By this time they had reached the outskirts of the village. At one side of the road, in a recess of hedge and bank, there was a pump whose clear cold waters had been available for Thorpe Aspen from time immemorial. Alfred was inclined for a drink out of the well-remembered spout, and Tim seemed to have some views in the same direction. The cobbler laid hold of the pump handle and set to work with vigour to fill the trough with water. Then down he went on his knees, and doffing his battered hat he plunged his head into it, once, twice, thrice, and rose cool and sobered to his feet. He rubbed himself fairly dry with a big coloured pocket handkerchief from his pocket, put on his hat again, and turning to his companion said—

"There! That's mah prescription for cheeatin' the ninepenny. Noo, Mr. Alfred, give us a grip o' your hand. Ah knoa yo', bud your seeacrit's as seeafe wi' me as if it were locked up i' the Bank o' England. If you'll cum' along o' me, oor Sally 'll gi' a corner an' a rasher o' bacon,

an' jump at t' job. Ah reckon yo' deean't want to be knoan."

Alfred was nonplussed; taken thoroughly aback. He was just about to turn and hasten back with all speed along the Chilworth road, when Tim continued—

"Jacob Benson tell'd me when yo' com' here afoore, an' 'im an' me's kept it dark for your seeak fra' that tahme te this: an' ah can keep this dark an' all."

There was something so honest and straightforward in this avowal, and Alfred hungered so much for news of home, that he resolved to trust Tim for the night at any rate. He was strangely humble, and his heart was sick and sore.

"Tim Crouch," said he, taking the cobbler's hand, "I'll trust you!"

"You may," said Tim, with a nod so vigorous as to topple his tall hat over his eyes, and as he brought one closed fist down upon the open palm of the other by way of solemn oath and covenant, the two passed along rapidly through the darkened village street to the cobbler's home. Doubtless Tim felt that in one thing he was already a gainer by this transaction:—with Alfred by his side, he should escape the hitherto anticipated cudgelling of Sally's trenchant tongue.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RUTH HARTGOLD IS IN GREAT PERIL; AND ROBERT ATHELING TAKES A DESPERATE LEAP.

"But how much unexpected, by so much
We must awake endeavour for defence;
For courage mounteth with occasion."

Shakespeare.

"In life there are meetings which seem
Like a fate."

Owen Meredith.

"FIRE!" Surely there is no single word so full of dreadful meaning and dire alarm as this, and especially when it is uttered in the dead of night by those who know and feel the peril of the hour. The enemy whose unexpected onset the word announces is so strong, so sudden, so swift, so remorseless, and, alas, full often so awfully destructive to human life!

When Robert Atheling raised the cry of alarm in Sharon Lodge, the flame had gotten so firm a hold upon one wing of the large and well-built mansion that there was little hope of saving it from entire collapse. Ephraim Hartgold, roused from his first sleep by Robert's stentorian tones, had instantly uplifted his own window, and shouted the cry far out into the night. In a wonderfully short space of time

the warning had reached the nearest fire station: and the first fire engine, with its full complement of men, heroes in their brazen helmets, every whit as brave as they who fight on fields of war, and engaged in a far more guiltless conflict, was rattling along the suburban streets eager to do battle with its fierce and furious foe.

But with whatever speed the firemen came the fire sped faster still, and Ephraim and Robert were at their wits' end to know what it was best to do.. Ruth, the light of Ephraim's eyes, the joy of Keturah's heart, the life of Sharon Lodge, and the object of admiration, and of something warmer still on the part of 'Boaz' from among the corn-fields of Aspendale, was sleeping in a chamber at the end of the wing which seemed doomed to feed the fire. In it was a window with a balcony, so situated that it commanded a view of an extensive and varied landscape, a Surrey land-scape, which for quiet beauty is not easily to be excelled. Ruth had chosen this bedroom because of this. Here she used to sit in 'maiden meditation' for many an hour when her sober-minded parents were 'lapped in soft repose.'

I wonder if it ever entered her mind, in the very highest and farthest and strangest of her dreams or fancies, this dainty Ruth, that her Boaz would come to her, not amid her gleanings in the golden harvest-field, but through that window and by that projecting balcony, to fetch her to his arms and heart at the peril of his life.

Ephraim Hartgold, impelled by all his wealth of love for his only child, had dashed along the corridor, had sprung through the blinding smoke and darting flame up the first few steps that led to the chamber where his darling slept. But he was beaten back, beaten utterly by the suffocating cloud of smoke, by the forked flames that licked him with their fatal tongues. He rushed back again for air, and with the aid of the groom he sought to procure a ladder to gain access from the outside.

"Where is she?" said Robert Atheling to Mrs. Hartgold, who had now come upon the scene, and who, fairly startled out of all her Quaker self-containment, was wringing her hands, and calling "Ruth! Ruth!"

The young farmer, under the spell of that potent name, was equal to any possible deed of daring. The mother pointed to the window, in answer to his question, in speechless fear. In an instant, Robert was climbing along ledge and sill, projecting coign and leaden gutter, clinging to spout and cornice, for the quaint gothic of Sharon Lodge, its odd angles and gables, had precious use as well as ornament just then; putting his life in peril at almost every leap. But being on that errand, the yeoman bore a charmed life, and dared each moment a greater danger in his resolve to save the maiden from the awful fate that menaced her.

Robert had barely taken a final and most daring spring from a projecting angle to the iron railing of the balcony, drawing himself up by sheer strength of will and muscle, than Ruth, roused at last from her quiet slumbers, discovered that she was enveloped in smoke, and could do little more than gasp, and that almost in vain, for breath. Leaping from her bed and making for the door she saw, through joint and rift and cranny, the lurid streaks of fire. Had she been able to open the door the maiden must inevitably have perished in the inrush of invading flame. With much calmness and self-command, though her heart fluttered fierce and fast at the thought of her awful peril, she struggled to the window, which was dashed open by Robert Atheling just as she was seeking to lay her hand upon the latch. At once he dragged her out upon the balcony, and bade her stand at the further corner where the balcony overpassed the window, so that she was sheltered by the wall. Then he plunged into the growing smoke-cloud, sure presage of the bursting flame, and pulled out, with the strength of three men, bed, mattress, and bed clothing. These he lifted

over the balcony, endeavouring to drop them so that they should make a heap upon the flower-beds down below.

Ruth had now a glimmering of his purpose. She said, in tones that trembled with fear and excitement—

"O Mr. Atheling! I dare not take that leap!"

"I do not ask you," said Robert calmly, the calmness born of trust in God and of a strong resolve. "Will you trust me? Will you trust yourself to me? If you will, we may both be saved."

He himself did scarcely dare to hope for this; but, he felt that he could so arrange their descent that she at anyrate might reach the ground without serious harm; as for himself, he was willing if needs be to die if her safety could be secured. Again he said, for she was silent for a little, wondering to herself what, for his best chance of safety, she ought to do—

"Will you trust me, Ruth?"

"Yes," said she, reverencing the knight who dared so desperately for her, "I will do what you desire."

After that, the Quaker maiden was as strong and firm of purpose as himself.

At this point they heard the shout of Ephraim, who had at length succeeded in bringing a long ladder. At that moment, too, they heard the rattle of the fire-engine, and saw the bright brass helmets of the men. But, alas, there was something nearer still! The floor of Ruth's bedroom crashed downward; the ribbons and sheets of flame leaped at them, and it was clear that the balcony was not tenable a moment longer.

Robert sat himself deliberately on the horizontal rail that capped the balcony, with his face turned to the open window.

"Come to me, Ruth!" he said, and opened his arms for her.

She knew, or thought she knew, for what purpose he

called her—what he was about to do. She knew still more confidently that he was calling her to his heart, more widely open than his arms, to take her in. She knew also that she felt no fear of the fire behind her, nor of the desperate leap before her, in her glad willingness to obey the call. It was a strange moment for a betrothal! It was not intended as such by either, yet it was known instinctively by both.

Firmly clasping her around the waist, and bidding Ruth clasp him round his neck, Robert steadied himself for one moment; took his bearings by one anxious look below; took fresh help and courage by an upward look to heaven, and then, turning round, he swung himself outside the balcony, and, with his precious burden in his arms, made a desperate leap for life!

"God help us!"

The prayer left the lips of each of them at the same time. Surely that prayer was heard, or Robert must have perished and his helpless burden too. Ruth instantly lost consciousness. Robert's feet struck the garden soil, not on the bed as he had planned, but a little beyond it. His heels went deep into the delved earth, and falling backwards, he lay partially on the materials he had dragged from the chamber—lay with the still insensible maiden held in his arms, her loosened wealth of hair upon his shoulder, and her head upon his breast.

Ephraim Hartgold had seen the desperate leap, had breathed his earnest prayer, 'God help them,' with all the fervour of a father's heart, and then, raising his helpless child from the manly yeoman's firm embrace, breathed an equally fervent blessing on the saviour of his daughter's life. Her father bore her to that portion of the house which, thanks to the skill and energy of the firemen, was safely severed from all danger from the doomed wing. Others bent to lift Robert in their arms, and many a

wondering word of praise and cheer was uttered by those who had been spectators of the daring deed.

"He's a brave man!" said the captain of the company of firemen, as he knelt to discover whether the hero of the night had suffered serious harm.

"I guess that was a jump that may well be called a jump," said another; "the wonder is, that he didn't jump his life out."

"Are you hurt?" said the captain, taking him by the hand. "Can you bear to be carried into the house, think you?"

"Handle me gently, if you please," said Robert calmly, and with a faint attempt at a smile. "Things might have been a good deal worse, but there's something amiss somewhere, though I cannot just tell you what it is. How is Ruth?"

He was told that from the position in which the young lady had fallen it was not likely that she had suffered any very serious harm. Whereupon, the prostrate man's eyes showed a glad sparkle, and the smile came back again less faintly than before. He was very pale and very helpless; and if maiden Ruth could have seen him at that moment—she had his likeness as he sat upon the balcony imprinted on her heart for ever—she might well have doubted whether that strange betrothal, that intuitive marriage of two hearts, was not the presage of her own heart's widowhood ere any wedding links could be welded by the formulas of law.

As soon as they sought to lift him, Robert could not altogether repress the groan which told of the injuries he had received, for in sooth the pain was acute. By careful action and steady motion, however, kindly hands moved by sympathetic hearts bore him into the pleasant parlour where they had sat on the previous evening, and where Ruth was now lying on a sofa receiving the affectionate

attention of her grateful mother. Keturah had been able without serious difficulty to bring her swooning daughter back to life, not greatly the worse for her swift flight through the air, though shaken and ill by the nervous shock of that uncommon leap for life. Keturah had still a newer subject to exercise her mind, when as soon as Ruth had come to herself she said with a novel look into her mother's face—

"Is Robert safe?"

"It was 'Mr. Atheling' last night," thought the shrewd Keturah. "It is 'Robert' now, and as Ruth says it, sounds a very pleasant name indeed." Of these things, however, she said nothing, content to 'ponder them in her heart.' Of course a doctor had been quickly summoned, and the man of skill, after due examination, predicted that Ruth would soon recover with gentle nursing and quietude and care. That opinion had just been delivered when Robert was brought in; and Ruth quickly assured the doctor that she was right enough, and that Mr. Atheling required his instant attention. It was 'Mr. Atheling' now, for the blush was still upon her cheek which had come there when, for the first time, she had heard the name of Robert slipping from her own unaccustomed and unfamiliar lips.

With Robert Atheling, as the doctor soon discovered, matters were very different. His whole strength had been put forth in climbing from point to point to reach the balcony, and this itself had strained nerve and muscle to a degree which, until now, he had neither known nor felt; and the leap from the balcony, besides seriously jarring his whole system, had resulted in a broken rib or two, and also a broken arm.

"Is that about the sum total, think you, doctor?" inquired Robert quietly, when the examination was complete.

"That's all, as far as I can see at present," said the doc-

tor. "And enough, too, I should think," added he, with a smile.

"It's wonderfully cheap at the price. What about Ruth?" was Robert Atheling's curious reply!

The kindly grey eyes of Keturah were turned upon him with an expressive gleam in them. Keturah knew what he had obtained at the cost of that desperate leap. How to regard the patent fact she hardly knew just then; she only knew it as a fact about which there could be no dispute. She had certa nly rather that Boaz, whoever he might be, should be one of her own sectarian fraternity; but on the other hand she felt—what was after all of far greater importance—that Robert, like Ruth, had a heart of gold. She placed her hands upon his brow, adjusted the cushions of the couch whereon he lay until he could be removed to bed, gave him a smile that told the story of her thankfulness and regard, and said—

"Friend Robert, thee hast said enough. At present, thy 'strength is to sit still.'"

CHAPTER XXXII.

"JOSS" COMES IN FOR A STROKE OF GOOD FORTUNE; AND NED SALTMER CONSULTS HIS WIFE ON A SUBJECT OF IMPORTANCE.

"Except wind stands as it never stood,
It is an ill wind turns none to good."

Tusser

"Tidings do I bring, and lucky fortune
And golden times."

Shakespeare.

WHILE these incidents were transpiring by the side of Robert Atheling's couch, Ephraim Hartgold was heard to utter a cry of vexation and surprise. Now that the excitement raised by the advent of that dread enemy, fire, had in some degree subsided, the good Quaker was minded to see that nothing had been lost during the stirring and pressing anxieties of the night. He had discovered that some thief or thieves had taken advantage of the opportunity unwittingly given to rifle the oaken cabinet, and to abstract, in addition to some minor items of spoil, the bag of gold with the letters H. H. upon it—that long missing bag to which all Alfred Atheling's troubles and wanderings were due.

Of course, now that Robert had himself discharged Mr. Hudson Harvey's claims, the money was his rightful pro-

perty, and the honest Quaker was sorely annoyed. It was a happy thing, he said to himself, that Alfred's innocence of theft did not now need the production of the bag to make it clear; still the amount of money was large, and for many reasons it was desirable that the veritable bag itself should be forthcoming. Information was at once given to the police; and the next day an advertisement of the theft, with a full description of the bag, was sent to the daily papers: an advertisement which was inserted for several days, and which was destined to bear fruit of a very singular and unexpected kind.

In the small hours of the morning that succeeded that eventful night, a careful watcher on the borders of the Thames might have seen a seedy-looking individual creeping stealthily along the narrow street in which Ephraim Hartgold's tall warehouses lifted high their fronts into the night. He was not exactly dressed or featured after the Bill Sykes pattern, although he carried in his inner pocket a stolen bag of gold, and although he had burglariously entered Sharon Lodge under the convenient cover of the alarm of fire. He was simply one of the too numerous thousands ever to be found in the multitudinous metropolis who are for ever prowling for some chance occasion of appropriating, without too much risk, the property of others.

Having paused a few moments to assure himself that the coast was clear, he turned down a narrow bye-street, rapidly scaled a low wall, and made his way to an old half tumbledown house which had formerly been an office in connection with an adjoining wharf. Thrusting open the creaking door, which was neither locked nor latched, he closed it carefully behind him, struck a lucifer match, which lighted him up the broken stairs to a higher floor. It was a miserable place into which he now entered. On a rude and worn-out mattress in a corner lay a woman and a child,

both of them enjoying brief immunity from their hard lot, thanks to that true befriender of the weary—sleep. It was not much other or better than a lair, that wretched shelter, and yet it was the only 'home' the sleepers had—thanks to the ill-conduct of the man who has just come in—thanks, also, to the hideous traffic which has made him what he is; and to the British legislature which gives its special license to the manufacture of such wretches as he is by means of 'doctored' beer and gin!

The man stepped noiselessly to a candle which was inserted in the neck of a bottle and lighted it. Then he passed into a smaller room, knelt upon the floor, removed a loose and decaying skirting-board through which the nails that held it had been inserted into wooden wedges in the wall. Into a cavity previously made by the extraction of a brick he put the bag of gold, and having replaced the board, passed out into the other chamber, puffed out the candle, laid himself down upon the floor, with only the edge of the mattress for a pillow, and disposed himself to sleep. But it was not to be.

Whether Policeman 43 N, who was on that beat, had seen him scale the wall, or whether a spirit of exploration and inquiry had laid hold upon him, may not be known. Suffice it to say, that scarcely had the man on the floor sunk into his first 'beauty sleep' than the constable's bull's-eye lantern was turned upon his face.

"Hallo, Slinkey! Caught at last!" said the policeman exultantly; for Slinkey was 'wanted' at head-quarters for a miscellaneous assortment of misdeeds, and had hitherto successfully eluded all pursuit. Policeman 43 N congratulated himself too soon upon his capture, and was not destined in this case to hear the compliments of the sitting magistrate on his intelligence and zeal. No sooner had he said, 'Caught at last!' than Slinkey said with an oath—

"Not yet, my hearty!"

Jumping up from his low resting-place, he drove his bullet-head full butt against the constable's belt, 'doubled him up,' as he afterwards acknowledged; then leaping down the stairs at a bound, was across the yard and over the wall before the gasping guardian of the peace could spring his rattle and shout his 'Stop thief!' into the night.

The alarm brought another bull's-eye to his side as he climbed the walls, but that was all. The bird had flown. They returned to the rickety building and found the woman on the bed trying to pacify the crying child. They searched the all but empty rooms, finding nothing worthy of their notice. With commendable feelings of charity they permitted the shivering lodgers to stay where they were till morning, but after that they were to 'move on!' But whither! Oh weary, dreary life, for those in this awful London, whose whole wretched career may be summed up in the mocking words, 'Move on!' Then they left the poor creatures to their solitude; and left the bag of gold with the letters H. H. upon it, lying hid behind the skirting board, waiting for somebody to discover the treasure-trove and carry it away.

Although Slinkey had escaped from Policeman 43 N, he was not permitted to enjoy the sweets of liberty. His time had come. He was soon pounced upon by some other of the official watchers of the night, and was speedily placed within four strong walls, from whence he was only permitted to emerge in order to have a brief interview with a magistrate, and was then immured for a lengthened period within walls gloomier and stronger still. His poor wife and still more pitiful child wandered away, leaving the dilapidated building on the wharf untenanted.

Now it so happened that Ned Saltmer, who had been promoted by merit to be a foreman in his master's employ, had received orders to put this same building into tenantable repair. Hitherto the property had for a long time

been in Chancery; it was now out of that ruinous legal bondage, and was to be restored and favoured with a new lease of life. Of course it was necessary to make a thorough examination of the place, and Ned, taking his 'two-foot rule,' pencil and note-book, repaired thither for that purpose. Robert Atheling's dog, Joss, was permitted to accompany him; and indeed would have gone without permission if his fancy or his sense of duty disposed him that way. While Ned was thus engaged, Joss was making a close examination of the premises on his own account, probably with a view to the pleasures of a chase after a mouse or a rat.

Joss had concluded a preliminary scamper round the building, and had taken a superficial glance into all the rooms and corners, and at length had brought himself to a temporary standstill in the room where the hidden money lay. Into that room Ned had come, and was jotting down certain measurements and memoranda for business use. Just as he was turning away Joss began to bark. He had been pawing and sniffing at the skirting-board for some time; but he could not manage to pull it away, although it was not held very tightly in its place. When Ned turned to leave the room, Joss thought it was time to appeal for help, and so he lay on his belly just in front of the suspected spot, stretched out his fore-feet, and barked as though he knew that there was a rat just there, and he meant to have it before he went away. Ned came back, and instantly Joss's paw was on the skirting-board, and his black nozzle sniffing at the point of junction with the floor.

"All right, all right, old fellow!" said Ned, and in a moment the skirting-board was pulled away.

"Rats!" said Ned, content to stimulate his efforts now the hindrance was away.

But for an answer Joss inserted his paw in the hole

made by the withdrawal of the brick, dragged out the treasure-trove, seized it in his mouth and dropped it at Ned's feet. The metallic chink that followed told Ned of the nature of its contents, and with much wonder and some fear he lifted up the prize, and silently discussed the question, not how it came there, but what he ought to do with it now that it had fallen into his hands. He was quite clear of one thing, however, and that was that great credit was due to Joss. So the clever and sagacious dog was petted and patted to his doggish soul's delight.

"Well done, Joss!" said Ned. "It isn't often that you hev a chance o' baggin' game o' that kind. Is it?"

Matter-of-fact Ned quickly dropped the precious bag, more precious than he knew, into an inner pocket of his jacket and finished his measurements and inspection. Then as the shadows of the night were falling he made his way to his own snug cottage, close followed by the faithful Joss, who felt staid and sober as became a dog who had come into possession of a large fortune, and of a special vote of thanks.

As usual Ned was met at the door by his buxom little wife, who seemed always as if she were on the watch for a sight of his honest face. He paused for a moment until Joss had passed in before him.

"Honour to them that hez honour due to 'em," said Ned, with a smile on his face. "Joss is a good deal richer than I is, an' so I gives him preference, Nance."

"Whativer are yo' talkin' about, Ned?" said Madge, who was not in the secret.

"Why, the fact is," said her merry spouse, "Joss hez cum' in for a fortan, an' he's gi'en it into my hands for safe keeping."

Ned led the way, not into the kitchen but into the

parlour, the little room which was nominally the special quarters of Robert Atheling, but which was used, at his own request and with his good-will, by Ned and his cheery spouse.

Then Ned brought out the brown bag, and dropped it on the mantelpiece, so that its sonorous and suggestive chink might tell its own story.

"There, lassie!" said Ned, "that's Joss's private property. It lay behind an old skirtin'-board in a house that we're repairin' by the Thames' side. Joss smelt it or summat, an' niver gav' me ony peace till I knocked off the board. Then he fishes it oot of a hole in the wall, and brings it to me."

"What a wonderful thing!" said Madge, looking at the bag with widely opened eyes.

"That's just what I've been sayin' to myself all the way home," said Ned. "What made him know that there was onything there? Was it only what they call instink? Or did he smell it? Had somebody, somebody that he knows, handled it, and did he reco'nise the scent? Or was it just a Providence o' God, that nobody but Him can understand? I give it up. I'll be hanged if I know what to make of it. I'll warrant there's a matter o' two hundred an' fifty guineas i' that bag." Ned said guineas because it sounds so much more impressive. "Aye, three hundred, if there's a shillin'," he continued. "Now then, Madge, the question is, What is the next business? Can we find oot if onybody hez a better right to it? Or shall we get it settled upo' Joss, tied fast, by some celebrated dog lawyer—but there, it's scarce a jokin' matter. What next, Madge? Dear owd gell, you gen'rally manage to hit t' nail on the head. What shall we do with it?"

"Why the next thing, Ned, is your supper. Let's go an' get that business settled. That'll give us a bit o' time to

think o' this. It's as well not to be over-hasty in a matter o' this sort."

"Right again, bless her!" said Ned, first slapping his wife's broad back and then paying compensation for the liberty he had taken by giving her one, two, three kisses of such vigour that Joss was constrained to come from his resting place in front of the kitchen fire, to see what was the matter. It would not be fair, nor is it needful, to suppose that the money on the parlour mantelpiece had anything to do with this demonstration. Ned Saltmer dearly loved his wife, and that which I have just recorded was not at all an exception but entered fairly into the customary course of things. The poet Cowper says—

> "What is there in the vale of life
> Half so delightful as a wife,
> When friendship, love, and peace combine
> To stamp the marriage bond divine?"

If you had asked Ned Saltmer that question, he would have said—

"Why, nothing, especially mine!"

Under these circumstances, the little by-play in the parlour becomes eloquent indeed.

Madge did right to advise that they should take time to consider, for as they sat by the fire after supper had been disposed of, they were surprised, for the hour was getting late, by a vigorous rap-tap at the door. When Madge went to open it, a pleasant voice came from between a flourishing moustache and beard—

"Well, Mrs. Saltmer, how are you? Ay, but I'm glad to cross your threshold again," and so saying the speaker entered without another word.

"Why, Ned!" Madge called out, with a little cry of satisfaction, "here's Mr. Alfred! I knew he would come some of these days."

"Yes," said Alfred, shaking hands with Ned. "I've come again for shelter, and I need your confidence as much as ever."

Whereupon Ned looked at his wife and smiled an "aside." But here we must pause so far as Alfred Atheling's fortunes are concerned, until we discover how he had come to Ned Saltmer's door that night.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

BLACKBEARD FALLS A VICTIM TO THE WINE-FLASK; AND THE PLANS OF DON ANTONIO DE DIAZ ARE SUDDENLY INTERRUPTED.

"All pitying Heaven
Severe in mercy, chastening in its love,
Oftimes in dark and awful visitation,
Doth interpose, and leads the wanderer back
To the straight path, to be for ever after
A firm, undaunted, onward-bearing traveller,
Strong in humility who swerves no more."

Joanna Baillie.

HAROLD SPOFFORTH lay in the brigand camp, waiting for his death, and not now hoping, and in truth not just now caring for escape. His physical sufferings had latterly been very great, and Blackbeard seemed to have either received orders to treat him with gross indignity, or his natural tendencies that way had received a sudden and special development. Harold was pale and haggard, and his whole appearance gave proof and token that he had been, and was still, drinking of a bitter cup indeed. The desperate discipline to which he had been subjected had been nevertheless of great service to him. His was a real repentance, and his remorse for his many and shameful misdeeds was very genuine, how-

ever it might have been brought about. His long imprisonment and his growing peril had led him to think seriously, and to think righteously, concerning himself and his past conduct. With this had come memories of his godly mother, the mother whom he had so often and so greatly grieved; and his sister Ethel, the sister who he knew was praying for him at that hour. With this had come a desire and a resolve to pray for himself. Many a time and oft while on his bed of leaves, with the brawny Blackbeard walking to and fro as sentinel outside, he had asked of Heaven the pardon of his sin; had dared at times to ask for liberty and life, but in these wiser moments, with this proviso—

"Rather than live as I have lived, let me die."

For some short time past, Harold had had a comrade in distress, one who shared his cave with him and was of great value to him, not only in relieving the monotony of his solitary imprisonment, but in strengthening and guiding those better feelings and desires which had come to him in these darkening days. Señor Bonanza was a Cuban Creole of great wealth and high character, who had fallen into the hands of the brigands while on a tour through Spain, and was brought, like Harold, into the Montana forest fastness to be imprisoned until a large ransom should be paid. He was a gentleman who, judging from his snow-white hair—white as his locks were his beard and brows—was considerably over middle age. But it was not so, grief, a double grief, a grief that had taken out of life all that seemed to him to make life worth having, had whitened his hair and permanently saddened his soul. He was a man of commanding and yet attractive mien, and his influence over his fellow-prisoner was not only for good, but that continually. He refused to write for his ransom, for said he—

"The sea has swallowed up all my real treasures, and as for my life, it is not worth robbing my next heirs for. Let them keep the gold."

So they waited, these two, expecting any morning to be brought out to die.

One evening, just as the early dusk was darkening into night, the bandit who had undertaken the rescue of Harold Sp fforth for gold and for revenge, drew near to Red Pedro's camp in the forest of Montana. He silently crept towards that portion of the glade known as the 'prisoner's cave,' by a way known only to the initiated. Safely hidden on the hill slope behind the foliage of some stout evergreens, he could see the miserable Harold pacing to and fro along the ground in front of the cavern in which for the most part he was confined. Just within the cave he saw another individual. This he had no doubt was the other prisoner held for ransom. Blackbeard, the stalwart and brawny jailor and sentinel who had these two in charge, was leaning against the face of a rock at some short distance with his musket, ready charged, placed handily by his side. The spy among the evergreens knew Blackbeard well, knew also his prevailing weakness. It was by taking advantage of this weakness that he hoped to gain his purpose without danger and without alarm.

He had provided himself with a flask of spirits in which an opiate had been judiciously mingled. Moreover, he had taken care that flask and case and leathern strap should be just like those which were constantly in use among the brigands on their sorties after prey. Carefully watching his opportunity, he succeeded in lowering this into such a position that it would be seen by the sentinel as soon as he changed his position and began to stroll again along his chosen beat. He had not very long to wait in order to see the success of his *ruse*. The night was cold, and Blackbeard needed to infuse a little warmth into his feet

while walking. While he was thus engaged he spied the strap, and then the eminently suggestive case to which it was attached. It looked precisely as though it had come unbuckled by accident, and had dropped from the shoulder of one of his comrades, who with the rest of the band had departed that evening on an expedition of importance.

"Ha ha, ha!" laughed Blackbeard, as he drew a cigarette which he was lazily smoking from between his lips, "it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. That's just the sort of cordial I've been wishing for."

Blackbeard lost no time in uncorking the flask, and finding as he expected that it was well replenished, he lifted it to his lips with a prophetic smack to give it welcome, and regaled himself with a few such hearty draughts that but little was le t behind.

"Both good *and* strong!" said he, and smacked his lips again with evident relish. Then he proceeded to drain the bottle dry.

The man above him, secreted behind the evergreens, smiled grimly at the success of his scheme. He soon perceived that the opiate was beginning to work. Blackbeard felt drowsy. Leaning himself against the face of the cliff, he gradually sank to the ground as his sleep deepened, and at last, as he lay prone upon the earth, his stertorous breathing convinced the plotting watcher that he had now lost all power to interfere or sense to understand.

It was not many moments before Harold Spofforth noticed this unusual sound, and was asking himself the question whether he might not make a bold dash for freedom.

"Señor Bonanza," said he, to his noble-looking, white-haired fellow-prisoner, who had greatly won upon his regard, and whose kind and helpful companionship had made his trouble less—"Señor Bonarza, why shouldn't

we give our good friends the slip? Blackbeard's asleep, and as it seems to me drunk into the bargain."

At that moment, they were both startled by a voice from the slope above. It was the bandit who spoke, and as he spoke, he came boldly forward with a bow and a smile.

"Señor," said he to Harold, "if you desire to make your escape, follow me. Jacob Benson waits you at the waterfall."

Harold certainly had a desire to escape, and was prepared to follow anywhere, for nothing could be worse than to remain. He did not know anything about the waterfall, but he did know Jacob Benson, and rightly argued therefrom that his friends had not only not forsaken him but were hard at work on his behalf.

"I have a comrade in trouble," said Harold to the new comer; "we must escape together."

"Certainly," said the man, "only make haste, lest Blackbeard comes to life again."

This was said with a low exultant laugh, and in a tone which showed that he did not by any means expect to see such a sudden resurrection.

At once Harold and Señor Bonanza followed their guide along the secret and intricate path he had previously trodden. This was necessary in order to avoid the outposts of the camp, for Red Pedro was a military genius, and no camp could have been better guarded, so far as his plans and arrangements were concerned.

Without further speech or adventure they made their way until they came into the open country; and were drawing near to the neighbourhood of the waterfall, where Jacob Benson was supposed to be in waiting to complete the transaction by payment of the thousand pounds promised to the bandit in the event of his success.

Now while all these matters had been planned and were being transacted, Don Antonio de Diaz, or Red Pedro, as

we may now continue to call him, had been quietly and secretly arranging his plans for the abduction of Ethel Spofforth from the little village inn at Montana. His purpose was to transfer the fair maiden to his own camp in the forest to grace his private tent, and to become the victim of his own black hearted craft and passion. Watching their opportunity, two of his band, disguised as peasants, took advantage of a temporary absence on the part of Ethel's faithful henchman Jacob Benson to gain their ends. Hastily lifting Ethel into a sort of cabriolet which had been standing in the inn yard, 'waiting for an expected visitor,' they drove rapidly away in the direction of the mountains, the one seeking to stifle the maiden's screams, while the other urged the mule that drew the carriage to its utmost speed. They must needs pass for some distance along the road that led to the waterfall, and thither Jacob Benson had gone, if haply he might meet the brigand who was to produce Red Pedro's prisoner. As the gamekeeper was passing along the road at a good speed, he felt certain that he heard a woman's cry. Then he saw the conveyance rushing swiftly on. He was sure he heard his own name called—

"Jacob, Jacob! Help!"

Stalwart Jacob needed no more evidence. He had the strength of a lion at that moment. He knew that Red Pedro was capable of any deed, however dark. Drawing his revolver, he calmly waited, and as the vehicle drew near, he saw Ethel vainly trying to cast herself out of the carriage. A well-aimed bullet brought down the mule. Jacob rushed at once to the aid of his beloved young mistress, with his finger on the trigger ready for a second shot.

Red Pedro himself, who had all the while been in the vehicle, leaped out, and with a passionate curse, flung himself upon the gamekeeper, dagger in hand. Jacob's bullet whizzed by the ear of the brigand chief. It was not by his hand that the foul monster was to die. One of the two dis-

guised bandits came to Red Pedro's aid. The other held Ethel fast in his merciless embrace. At that instant Harold Spofforth leaped upon the wretch, and by sheer force of spasmodic strength choked the man, so that he was compelled to let Ethel go, and engage in a desperate struggle for his own life. Señor Bonanza lifted the maiden from the cabriolet and carefully placed her on the bank apart from the scene of strife.

Meanwhile, the bandit guide who was bringing Harold to the waterfall recognised Red Pedro. A fierce light flashed into his dark eyes. A yell of exultation leaped from his lips as he threw himself upon the brigand chief, and shouting, "From my sister Rosalie!" drove his dagger to the very hilt into his heart. Seeing the fate of their chief the two brigands made a dash for liberty and escaped. Red Pedro could not even utter a dying curse upon his former comrade. He died upon the road, which was crimsoned with his evil blood,—died, the wretched 'hero of "no" single virtue, and a thousand crimes!'

Ethel had fainted under the awful experiences of that night, and Harold and Señor Bonanza found it difficult to woo her back to life. As soon as it was possible to return to the inn, Jacob Benson sallied forth again, to transfer to the ex-bandit the stipulated reward.

"Take a friend's advice," said Jacob in his broken Spanish; "you have no excuse for dishonest courses now. You have avenged your sister. Where she is you can please her better by living an honest life."

"That is what I mean to do, señor," said the man quietly, and at once he sought safety by flight from that region. He knew that his late comrades would shoot him like a dog if he should hap to fall in their way.

Now that Red Pedro was dead, the villagers and the peasantry around, who had often served him under the influence of fear, made a public rejoicing. When the whole

matter was reviewed by the legal authorities there was no difficulty in clearing the little party from all legal blame. On the contrary, they were congratulated on having been the means of helping to deliver Spain from the cruel, cunning, and powerful tyrant who had so long been a terror and a pest to the community at large.

With all reasonable speed consistent with Ethel's health, which had been sorely shaken by late events, the little party returned to England. Señor Bonanza accompanied them, and by his kind and gentle attentions he won upon the esteem of Ethel, as he had already done upon the affections of her brother, to whom in his loneliness and peril he had proved a friend indeed.

In Ethel the noble Cuban found a congenial spirit, one to whom he could impart his confidences, and so it came to pass that she heard from his lips the story of that great grief which had whitened his hair and taken all the joy as it seemed to him out of his existence. It appeared that he had been at one time the Governor of the Island, and that an epidemic of yellow fever had robbed him of his two sons in the heyday of life and health and promise. Then he had sent off his wife and his only daughter to Europe to save them from falling victims to the same fatal scourge. The ship in which they had sailed was lost at sea, and both had gone down without a sigh. It was exceedingly touching to see the grief which tossed him like a tempest while he spoke of this last terrible bereavement. He said—

"The last of my treasures went down to their grave in the deep sea, and I am left, left alone! I am rich in wealth, it is true, but yet so poor that I did not care to ransom my life out of Red Pedro's power. I think I could have welcomed the bullet of the brigands. That would have sent me to rejoin my treasures in the land in which there is no more sea, and in which there are no graves."

Ethel, as may well be imagined, found a very congenial

mission in directing the bereaved husband and father to the one true Source of strength and consolation. She had her exceeding great reward in perceiving that this sore and stricken heart was willingly opened to receive the sweet, glad, hope-giving evangel of the Saviour's love. Many were the profitable conversations held between these two on their homeward route, Harold listening the while, with profit and with pleasure, to what until lately had been tedious topics in which he had no concern.

It was a great joy to Ethel to perceive this great and welcome change. "Sweet are the uses of adversity," says the world's greatest poet, and its uses in Harold's case had been serviceable indeed. This wanderer, worn and weary in the ways of sin, had come back to his Heavenly Father while yet in the brigand's cave, and was now coming back to his earthly father to say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight." His Heavenly Father had given him loving welcome; his earthly father, she well knew, would give him loving welcome home. All this was to the gentle Ethel matter of constant and exceeding joy.

They arrived safely in London. At Señor Bonanza's suggestion they put up at the same hotel. Ethel and Harold would have dearly liked to proceed at once to Aspen Towers, but it could not be. Harold was deeply anxious about Ethel's state of health, and acting on Señor Bonanza's advice, it was resolved that they should quietly rest for a few days before Ethel ventured on her long journey to the North.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

ALFRED ATHELING READS THE NEWSPAPER WITH ALARM; AND SIMON HOLMES TAKES AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY.

"If circumstances lead me, I will find
Where truth is hid."

Shakespeare.

"Then on, still on, where duty leads,
My course be onward still."

Heber.

TIM CROUCH and his wife Sallie soon made it clear to Alfred Atheling that there need be no question whatever as to their good faith. Sallie felt herself honoured in having an Atheling for a guest, for the family was held in high repute, and was accounted only a very little less aristocratic than the family at Aspen Towers. So she put an extra ribbon on her cap, and made a point of donning her best 'bib and tucker,' and quietly rejoiced in the thought that as a hostess she could now boast herself as being something out of the common. We have already got the key to Tim's course of conduct in this affair. He was co-partner with the absent Jacob Benson in the secret of Alfred's former visit, and was doubly responsible for guarding how much soever of his conduct the young man was disposed to hide. Moreover, Tim had

in him all the elements that were likely to favour an outlaw. His radicalism was of a very pronounced type indeed, and he was always willing to help to foil a bailiff, sheriff, constable, magistrate, or other legal official in their attempts to interfere with anybody's liberty. 'One man's as good as another,' was Tim's sweeping political creed, nor would he have hesitated to say, 'and a great deal better,' if the comparison lay between a 'proud minion of the law' and an outlaw, from almost whatever cause. Besides, both Tim and Sallie were fully as kind-hearted as the Yorkshire peasantry are said to be, and they rank high, though I say it myself.

So Alfred Atheling's secret was quite safe; and any danger of discovery was far likelier to arise from their over anxiety to prevent it than from any probability that they might be induced to betray their trust. Beneath the humble shelter of their roof, Alfred recovered health and strength, was able to write for the replenishment of his purse; and under cover of the evening shadows, and by the aid of sundry disguises, could pay frequent visits to the Garth, and obtain fleeting but most welcome glimpses of those who dwelt within. He felt as though he could be content with such rude quarters for a lifetime rather than face continuous banishment from Aspendale.

But, as usual, there was to be no rest for his wandering feet. He wore the yoke of his own misdoings; and the goad of retribution seemed to be constantly pricking his sides, that he might be made to move on and feel the galling pressure of the yoke the more. Tim Crouch received occasionally a London newspaper from a relative in the great city, who took that method of reporting himself alive and well. These newspapers Alfred perused with much interest, mainly because he had always an expectation of seeing his own name in print, in connection with his old misdeeds.

In one and the same paper Alfred read two paragraphs that greatly disturbed and alarmed him. The one was an item of news about the fire at Sharon Lodge; and by it Alfred was made acquainted with the fact that his brother Robert, who had saved Miss Hartgold at the peril of his life, was the guest of that very Ephraim Hartgold to whom belonged the *Good Intent*, on which he had left the peerless maiden Inez. Should he ever, ever see that much-loved face again? While his thoughts were thus engaged, his eye lighted upon another paragraph, an advertisement, and the while he read it, his face became deathly white. It was placed in the same column and nearly in the same place in which some months before he had read beneath the ugly word 'ABSCONDED!' his own name and shame. "Fifty pounds reward! Lost or stolen, a brown canvas bag containing upwards of three hundred pounds. The bag bears the letters H. H. stamped upon it in black ink, and is tied at the neck with green tape. The above reward will be paid to any one who shall bring the same to the Chief of the Police at Scotland Yard, or to Ephraim Hartgold, Smith Street, Thames Side."

Alfred Atheling could not and did not for one moment doubt that this bag was that missing one to the absence of which all his troubles owed their origin. But how did Ephraim Hartgold come to be mixed up with it? It was clear to him that the search for himself as a thief, and for the money as his booty, still continued, or had been revived in connection with some fresh clue through which he might be arrested almost on the steps of his mother's door. That mention of the Chief of the Police and Scotland Yard left no doubt in Alfred's mind that prosecution and a prison were impending; that the search would be sure to extend again to Aspendale, and that for his safety's sake he must hide himself among the teeming millions of the modern Babylon.

"You seeam as if you've dropped on te sumthing nut varry pleasant," said Tim Crouch, watching Alfred's changing countenance as he sat with the newspaper in his trembling hands.

Alfred showed him the paragraphs, and proceeded to announce his intention of going instantly to London, as search for him was certain to be made in Aspendale.

"Why," said Tim, "it isn't for me te set my opinion up afoore yours; but if ah was i' your shoes, ah wadn't leeave a seeaf corner, though it's nobbut a lahtle 'un."

"I've been very thankful for the corner, Tim. But I can't help it," said Alfred with a sigh. "The curse of the Wandering Jew is on me, and I must go. But I should like to come back if it be possible. Will you keep the corner open for me?"

"You'll be allus welcum', Mr. Alfred, varry," said Sallie, who was scarcely able to command her voice, for here as elsewhere Alfred had made himself a favourite.

"What Sal sezs ah sezs," added Tim, with as much sincerity as brevity "An' until farther orthers, mum's the wod at Crooch Cas'le."

On the next morning Alfred walked into Chilworth in order to take the early train to town. Now it so happened that on the same day Simon Holmes the carpenter had arranged to go to Hull in order to pay a large account, large from the stand-point of a village carpenter, to the merchant who supplied him with beams, deals, battens, and other foreign timber requisite for the prosecution of his trade. On all such occasions it was Simon's custom to take the early train that he might have a good long day in town. As he passed by the white gate that opened into Peter Prout's mill-yard he saw that stout personage, clad in his powdery mail of meal, leaning his arms upon the gate, and his chin upon his hands, as if on the look-out for some passer-by. The fact is that the miller was a busybody,'

and had ascertained that Simon was bent on a trip to Hull, or Hool, as Peter would pronounce it, shortening the double o so that it would rhyme with bull.

"Good mornin', Simon," said the miller graciously. "You're just the man ah wanted te see. My wod, but you don't meean te miss t' train. Why, bless me, you'll be at Chilworth station full fotty minutes ower seean."

"All right, Peter," said the carpenter. "That's a fault 'at's a good deal better te mend then bein' fotty seconds ower leeat. Waitin' for t' train te cum hez a good deal mair sense in it, then wishin' for it efter it's gone. Trains is varry decided sooart o' things an' it's nae use beckonin' 'em back when yance they're off. An' that's true o' sum other things, miller, besides trains. Noo—"

"Hey, hey, nae doot," said Peter, who had a pretty clear notion as to what the carpenter was driving at. "Ah want yo' te deea a lahtle job fo' mah i' Hull. Will yo' go' an' ax Trimlitt an' Sons te send mah a mill-wreet? There's summat matter wi' t' balance o' t' top mill-steeans, an' ah daren't use 'em till they're seen tae: there'll be a crash else."

"Yis, ah'll send him on," said Simon, twirling his stout black-thorn and preparing to proceed. "There's summat else that you an' me had better get seen tae, for fear of a crash 'at can't vary weel be mended. They say 'a stitch i' tahme seeaves nine,' but a tahmely care of another sooart 'll seeave us all. Let's think o' that, Peter, let's think o' that."

"Ah say, Simon," said the miller, who had opened the gate and come close to the carpenter that he might speak more quietly and confidentially, "ah've seen sumthing rayther surprisin', while ah was watchin' fo' yo'. There's sumbody a lahtle way aheead o' yo' 'at meeans te catch t' train at Chilworth as weel as you."

Simon cautiously waited in silence for further information.

"As sure an' sartain as you're standin' there, Simon, young Alf Atheling passed t' mill nut a quarter of an hoor since. My wod! hoo he hez altered! He's gotten a beard an' a moostash an' he's as white as my cooat,—but if it isn't him ah'll eeat him. What de yo' think te that?"

"You deeant say sae!" said Simon, "Ah wish you'd stopt him. Excuse me, ah'll catch him up. Oh but it wad be a grand thing if ah could bring him back!" and so saying the carpenter strode off with a new hope to quicken his pace.

"Ah say, Simon!" the miller shouted after him, "you weean't forget to call for t' mill-wreet!"

"Ah can't say, Peter. Efter what you've tell'd mah, ah isn't sure o' gettin' te Hull te-day. Hull business may wait if nobbut this may thrive."

So saying, the old carpenter strode along full four good miles an hour, praying as he went that the prodigal might retrace his steps to Aspendale, and to the anxious mother sitting, waiting, waiting by the ingle nook of Aspen Garth with the sickness at her heart which arises from hope deferred.

But Simon Holmes saw no sign of Alfred Atheling either on the road, or through the streets, or at the station, though he sought him carefully, so carefully that he had forgotten to take his ticket when the train came slowly in.

"Cum and Leetnin' Streeak," said a sarcastic and irreverent young porter. "If yo' don't tak' things a bit eeasier like, you'll be riddy be t' tahme 'at next train cums in; but ah'il be blest if yo' weean't be ower leeat for this!"

Jumping into the train, Simon gave one last look along the platform, and saw a young man with a 'beard an' moostash' such as Peter Prout had described, entering the train which was already in motion. "That's him!" said Simon to himself truthfully but ungrammatically, and resolved to speak to him at Shelby Junction, where he

himself had to change for Hull. But much to Simon's astonishment, the train shot through Shelby station without stopping! It was the first day of the month, the change had just been made, and the train that Simon should have taken was twenty minutes later at Chilworth to make way for the fast London Express. When the truth fairly dawned on the astounded carpenter, he jumped up from his seat, laid his hand on the door, and much to the amusement of his fellow passengers, exclaimed—

"Stop! This is t' wrong train." But the cry was vain, and Simon could not help quietly smiling at himself for making the absurd request. Resuming his seat he smiled again as he murmured aloud—

"Peter Prout 'll ha' te gan withoot his mill-wreet whatever cums te t' mill steeans."

"What station do we stop at next, if yo' pleease?" said Simon, addressing his next neighbour.

"Grantham, I think," was the answer, "then Peterboro', then London. This is a fast express."

"Consarn it!" said Simon, using the very strongest expletive that was ever known to leave his lips. "Ah'se in for it noo!" and again a quiet smile sat upon his face, as he fell into deep thought that kept his mind engaged for many a mile. "What does this mean?" thought he, for with his steadfast and unvarying faith in the Providence of God, he never looked on it as a 'strange chance.' Then he thought what a good thing it was that he had plenty of money with him, the money that was to have paid his timber bill. Where was the good of his getting out at Grantham? Well, he would get out there to get a good look at the young fellow with the beard. "If it's Alfred Atheling," said Simon, with an emphatic nod, "ah'll follow him to London."

At Grantham, Simon got a good look at the young man, such a look that the stranger set himself to work to stare him

off, sternly and resentfully, not at all a difficult thing to do, for Simon was constitutionally nervous among strangers and easily abashed.

"Hi!" shouted the man with the moustache to the paper boy. Simon thought he was called, and went boldly to the carriage door as the boy with the news-basket arrived.

"Not *you*," said 'Moostash' to Simon sharply, as if to snap off his unwelcome attentions. But that *very* look brought out the Atheling features, Simon felt sure!

"Have you got this week's *Popular Reader?*" said the stranger to the boy.

A bright thought struck Simon.

"I say, laddie," said he, "do you think there's onything in it by Ralph Ravensworth?"

The young man started, gave one swift glance at Simon, reddened to the very tips of his ears, and retreated to his seat.

"You're right, Peter Prout," said Simon to himself, "it's Alfred Atheling withoot a doot."

"Now, gentlemen! take your seats, if you are going on!" said the guard, and in another moment the express was swiftly whirling the old carpenter to famous London town.

At Peterborough, Simon Holmes did not trouble to keep an eye on Alfred, for it was really he, and that young gentleman began to think he had shaken him off after all. But Simon was sending a special telegram to Thorpe Aspen, prepaying it sufficiently to insure its being taken by messenger from Chilworth, to put his wife at ease as to his whereabouts and safety. At length London was reached. The express emptied itself at the platform of the King's Cross Station. Alfred had but little luggage to care for, Simon had none. Alfred passed out with Simon at his heels. Simon must speak—

"I say, Mr. Alfred!"

"Begone, sir! or I'll call the police!" said the young man, determined to elude him.

The old carpenter was taken aback, stood stock still, with his mouth open. Such a rebuff was uncommon—such a threat unheard of. Then the human stream rushed in between them, and Simon found himself vainly battling with the crowd to keep his quarry within sight. True to his guiding faith and rule of conduct, Simon asked help of Heaven, linked himself to the throne of the Eternal there in the roar of the city street. Then he found himself standing by a post on a 'rest' in the middle of the road. There he saw a young man jump into a hansom cab: heard him call out to the driver "Victoria Park," and as he turned his face towards him, Simon knew that it was Alfred Atheling—gone! and that he was left stranded in the city, without even a recommendation to a respectable lodging for the coming night.

But Simon Holmes, it may be truly said, was never without a Counsellor, and he felt neither anxiety nor fear concerning himself. There he stood, asking himself and his God what he had better do. Was it chance or something else that called to his mind Robert Atheling and the fire out of which he had snatched an imperilled life? Was it the thrill of sympathy he felt when Mrs. Atheling read him Robert's letter that stamped on his memory the name of "Mr. Ephraim Hartgold, Sharon Lodge, Wimbledon."

"Yes," said Simon to himself with a quiet smile, "that's what I'd better do."

CHAPTER XXXV.

EPHRAIM HARTGOLD GOES ON BOARD THE "GOOD INTENT;" AND MAIDEN INEZ GOES TO SHARON LODGE.

"An honest man, close-buttoned to the chin,
Broad cloth without, and a warm heart within."

Cowper.

"This is the porcelain clay of human kind."

Dryden.

BUT we must now get on board the good ship *Good Intent* again, in which we have left several in whose fortunes we are interested a most unconscionable while. Ephraim Hartgold's first business, on the day after the fire at Sharon Lodge, was to repair to Gravesend, as the skipper had predicted.

"Good morning, Captain Crumpit," said the merchant as soon as he stood on deck, shaking the honest skipper by the hand. "I'm glad to see thee and thy ship safe home again. Hast thou anything special to report? How are the men? How about the ship? What of the cargo?"

The Quaker merchant was never known to neglect that first question, or to put it other than first to any skipper in his employ. And that was the order in which they stood in his own mind. First the crew, then the ship, then the cargo. That was their order, for that was their

order according to their value and importance, according to the convictions of his conscience, the judgment of his mind, and the dictates of his heart. When the British merchant service is everywhere conducted in that fashion, and all shipowners act on that principle, the succession of brave British seamen will not dwindle either in quality or quantity, neither will the deep sea swallow up so many, so very many precious sailors' lives.

Captain Crumpit was able to report favourably concerning all the matters about which the owner had made inquiry.

"All's well, sir," said he, "and I think the cargo will show a sound venture; but that isn't so uncommon as to make it needful to mention it."

Ephraim lifted his grey eyes to the skipper's face to see what the last remark implied; and he found such an honest admiration there of his employer's business aptitudes that he could not repress a smile.

"We've brought home a little party of castaways," continued Captain Crumpit. "We picked 'em up on the high seas after they had been adrift for eight and forty hours in an open boat."

"Poor fellows!" said Ephraim, speaking as he felt. "Thou didst well, Captain. That's the sort of thing that brings a ship 'good luck,' as you sailors call it. I call it the blessing of Heaven on kind deeds. How many are there of them? Where are they?"

In a few moments Captain Lanyon made his appearance, followed by his two faithful friends and shipmates, Joe Hewitt and Will Trounce. Captain Crumpit, as we know, had sounded the trumpet for his employer both heartily and constantly, and the unfortunate ex-skipper of the *Boadicea* and his comrades were prepared to fall in love with the kindly looking Ephraim at once.

"I am heartily glad to see you safe and sound," said he,

"and to congratulate you on your merciful escape from a watery grave. I trust, Captain Lanyon, that both thee and thy companions have not failed to give thanks to Him that sent the *Good Intent* to your relief."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Captain Lanyon, lifting his hat reverently in acknowledgment of his debt to their True Deliverer, "a man must have a hard heart that can be saved as we were saved without saying in his heart, 'Thank God!' And I speak for my comrades as well as for myself when I say, 'We've said it many a time with our lips, and we've felt it all the time in our hearts.'"

So saying he turned to the two sailors that they might endorse the statement.

"That's the vardict o' Will Trounce, your honour," said that honest tar with an emphasis that spoke volumes for his sincerity.

"Joe Trounce says D I T T O, spelt wi' capital letters, all on 'em," said that worthy, and Ephraim was constrained to conclude that no stronger testimony could be desired.

"Well, what do you propose to do?" asked Ephraim in a way that convinced them all that true interest prompted the inquiry.

"Well, if it's all the same to your honour," said Will Trounce, "we should like to do duty an' eat ship-biscuit, me an' my mate here, in some craft belongin' to the owner of the *Good Intent*, an' specially if so be that Captain Lanyon can be skipper o' the same."

"That's ezac'ly the size of it, sir," said Joe Hewitt, touching his tarpaulin cap. "That would be what I calls hample compensation for sailin' in a rotten old tub wi' half a score o' mutinous rascals by way o' shipmates! Here's Captain Lanyon, sir. Me an' Will Trounce ha' sailed with him for full seven years. He can give us a character, an' he will, too, if your honour'll ax him."

"An' if your honour wants a 'stificate with him, Joe

Hewitt an' me can perwide a dokyment a precious sight more genu*ine* than they give 'em at the Board o' Trade."

Captain Lanyon could not help smiling at the highly original way in which the tars pleaded their cause and his own. He felt that they had put things exceedingly well; and he quickly and wisely concluded that the transparent honesty of their appeal might be quite enough, and serve his purpose better than even a personal application.

At this moment Captain Crumpit reappeared, bringing with him the maiden Inez, who was getting back something of the nerve and strength which had been so sorely shaken in consequence of her severe experiences while in peril on the sea. As the skipper presented the beautiful girl to the merchant, the latter fairly started with surprise, not so much at her natural beauty, which was sufficiently striking of itself, as at the cast of her features, which reproduced, almost with the exactness of a photograph, the face of a well remembered friend of 'auld lang syne.'

"Why, who hast thou got there, Captain Crumpit?" said Ephraim, smiling and taking the girl kindly by the hand.

It was amusing and yet touching to see the reverent and confiding way in which the maiden looked at the merchant. She had heard all about his charities and kindnesses, his care for his sailors, and his no end of virtues, from the lips of Captain Crumpit, and the impression it had made upon her mind and heart was deep.

"This is another of the castaways, sir," said Captain Crumpit. "She's the daughter of Captain Lanyon."

"Surely not," said Ephraim, turning to look at the undeniably Saxon features of her reputed father. "The nestling has no resemblance to the parent bird. Maiden, what is thy name?"

"My name is Inez," said she, "because I have never had any other: and 'Lanyon' because my father gave me his."

Seeing the look of dubiety and wonder upon the merchant's face, Captain Lanyon proceeded to explain their peculiar relationship to each other. Ephraim listened seriously, and kept his eyes fixed on the dark eyes, olive cheeks, and glistening black tresses of Inez, with surprise imprinted on his own face. To himself, he said—

"Her very image! How strange! How very, very strange!"

The fair lassie, wondering, perhaps, at his earnest look, yet won by his gentle tone and manner, felt her heart go out to him in trustful confidence. She looked at his white hair, lying smoothly in a fringe upon his brow; she looked into the depths of his grey eyes in which truth and goodness were enshrined. Taking hold of his hand again, she said with a natural simplicity peculiar to her—

"God loves such as you. Everybody calls you the 'sailor's friend.' My father is a sailor. I am going to put your name in my prayers."

"Thanks, maiden," said Ephraim, doing his best to maintain his Quaker calm. "I shall be glad to have my name put there. May all thy prayers be answered!"

An innocent blush suffused her cheeks, and lifting her dark drooping lashes, she fixed her bright eyes upon him and said—

"If they are, we shall find out where Mr. Ravensworth is gone, and God will bring him back again."

"Mr. who, my young friend?" asked the Quaker with renewed surprise.

Captain Lanyon again interposed.

"Inez refers," said he, "to a young gentleman who took passage with me to America on board the *Boadicea*. He and Inez became great friends. He stood nobly by me in the mutiny of my crew, and his tender care of Inez during our great peril on the sea, neither I nor Inez can ever forget. Much to our grief, and for some mysterious reason,

he left the *Good Intent* soon after we dropped anchor here, and where he is we cannot tell."

"What did you say his name was?" inquired the merchant.

"Ralph Ravensworth, sir. May God bless him wherever he is!" said Captain Lanyon with deep feeling. "I would give much to look upon his face once again."

Ephraim Hartgold noticed that Inez had turned away to hide the tell-tale tears that were stealing down her cheek. The worthy merchant had much food for thought. He felt certain that 'Ralph Ravensworth' was the name which, according to the testimony of Robert Atheling, his unfortunate and misguided brother had assumed. He took a few turns along the deck buried in his own thoughts. His mind was strongly exercised both in relation to Inez and the young man whom she hoped and prayed she might see again. He felt that he must keep Captain Lanyon by him, and that for three reasons. First, he felt strongly inclined to give him the command of the *Ruth Hartgold*, a new vessel of his own which was then approaching completion; second, he was intensely desirous, for as yet undiscovered reasons, to get at the secret of the parentage of the maiden Inez; third, it was important that every clue that might lead to the discovery and recovery of Alfred Atheling should be kept well in hand. Then the thought 'struck him,' as the common but insufficient saying goes, that the sweet and gentle Inez would be a pleasant companion for his daughter Ruth during the enforced imprisonment and quiet rendered necessary by the shock consequent upon her peril and strange rescue from the fire at Sharon Lodge. So true it is that

> "There is a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough hew them how we will."

Happy they and wise who hold a loyal faith in the sure

Providence that controlleth all, both men and circumstances, and who believe, and ever act as though they do believe that

"Behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own."

"Captain Lanyon," said the merchant at last, suddenly turning to the wondering and anxious skipper, "oblige me by being my guest for a few days. I think I can serve thee with a ship; and I want to know more of this Ralph Ravensworth, and also of the maiden who is as thy daughter, and to whom thou hast been indeed a father. My daughter Ruth will be greatly pleased and comforted by the girl's companionship. She is just recovering from a severe nervous shock. We are something upset by a fire which broke out at Sharon Lodge—that is my dwelling. But," he continued with a smile, "there is still room enough for thee and thine. Wilt thou say yea, and place me under a real obligation?"

Captain Lanyon was nothing loth, both for his own and his daughter's sake. So he promptly said "Yea," stipulating only, that after he had seen Inez safely placed in her new quarters, he should be at liberty to go down to Deal for a little while, that he might look after his cottage and put matters in train for the maiden's ultimate return to her own well-loved home.

Then the merchant turned again to the skipper of the *Good Intent.*

"Captain Crumpit," said he, "find a berth if you can for those two seamen for the present. We will see what can be done for you," he continued, turning to Joe Hewitt and Will Trounce. "It is not unlikely that Captain Lanyon may be able to take you with him on another voyage."

"God bless your honour," said Joe Hewitt. "May the tide o' good fortune float you and your ships into every

port you make for, and bring your honour into safe harbour when your voyage is ended."

"With a cargo o' happiness that'll last to all etarnity," chimed in Will Trounce.

"Thank you, my lads," said Ephraim with a smile on his grave face. "It will have to be something more and better than 'good fortune' that can do that for me. Good living, by the grace of God, can do that both for you and me."

Then business-like Ephraim began to give orders concerning the ship and cargo; and went about the transaction of his daily business with as much shrewdness, strictness, and hard-headed notions of profit, as if he had neither head nor heart for anybody's affairs but his own.

"Ephraim Hartgold's a hard-headed sort of man," somebody once said to Captain Crumpit.

"Yes," said the skipper in reply, "he's a hard head for money, and a heart of gold for men."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ROBERT ATHELING RECEIVES A VISIT FROM AN OLD FRIEND; AND SENOR BONANZA FINDS LIFE TO BE WORTH LIVING.

"Welcome, my old friend,
Welcome to a foreign fireside."

Longfellow.

"A hundred thousand welcomes: I could weep
And I could laugh; I am light and heavy:
Welcome!"

Shakespeare.

ROBERT ATHELING was sorely shaken by his desperate leap, and that, together with the fracture of his rib and arm, compelled him to remain an inmate of Sharon Lodge. This in itself, with Ruth to lighten his imprisonment, was not to be greatly sorrowed over. What did tend to make him impatient was the uncertainty as to Alfred's fate and fortune. Only himself could tell how gladly he had reported the fact to the dear ones at Aspen Garth that, however wild and wicked the lad had been, he had not disgraced himself and dishonoured his name by base and wilful theft. Robert dearly longed to be up and about again, not only that he might prosecute his search, but that he might proclaim everywhere the proof positive that Alfred had never appropriated Mr. Hudson Harvey's gold.

It will not be wondered at, therefore, that when good old Simon Holmes the carpenter made his appearance at Sharon Lodge, Robert Atheling at any rate was willing to believe that God had brought him there to tell him the news which beyond all others was calculated to gladden his heart and to help to set him on his legs again. Robert was lying on the sofa with a book in his hand, the only occupant of the parlour when the maid brought him the intelligence that an elderly man was at the door, asking to see him.

"To see me, Ann?" said Robert in some surprise. "What is he like?"

"He's a tallish man, sir, with long grey hair, and a very pleasant face." Then she continued with a smile, trying to imitate Simon's mode of speech, "He said, 'If yo' pleease, will yo' kindly tell me if Mr. Robert Atheling o' Aspin Garth is at this hoose?' and when I asked him 'what name?' he said, 'Misther Robert Athelin'.'"

"Ask him in!" said Robert, in love with the dear peculiar dialect even when he heard it at second-hand. "I do believe it's dear old Simon Holmes. Whatever brings *him* to town?" and his breath came and went in little gasps as he thought that maybe he had news of Alfred!

"Ay, Mister Robert!" said the old carpenter, "I'se glad to see yo'. Can yo' let me shak' your hand? Will it ho't yo'? If it will, I'll do it i' my heart, till it tingles to your fingers' ends. Are yo' better?"

"A thousand welcomes, old friend," said Robert, venturing the hand of his sound arm into Simon's keeping. "Yes, I'm better; but pray tell me what's brought you to London? I hope there's nothing wrong at Aspen Garth."

"Nowt in the wo'ld!" said Simon. "Mak' your mind eeasy. It *is* rayther surprisin' to see me here. The fact is, I was gannin' te Hull, an' I got into an express train by mistak', an' it browt me so far, willy nilly, that I com' the rest o' t' way te pleease myself. But, Mr. Robert, I've seen Mr.

Alfred! an' it was to keep my eye on him that I com' right through."

"You have! and where is he?" said Robert with anxiety in every feature of his face.

"I wish I could tell yo' that mitch," said Simon a little ruefully; "but he jumped into a cab o' sum' sooart, an' slipt away."

"Oh dear," said Robert with a sigh. "Where did he go, I wonder?"

"I heeard him tell t' driver to tak' him to Victoria Park—"

"You did!" exclaimed Robert, bringing his sound hand down on Simon's knee with a force that made him jump. "Then he's gone to Ned Saltmer's, and the lost is found!"

"Ah say, Mr. Robert," said Simon drily, and reverting to the homeliest East Riding vernacular, "there's a famous lot o' strength i' that fist o' yours yit. Consarn it! you can cum' it strang for a waik 'un!" and Simon rubbed his knee, while his grey eyes twinkled with delight at Robert's gladness. He was quite sure now, if he had doubted it before, that God had an errand for him in London that was well worth attending to.

"Excuse my fervour, old friend," said Robert, "but in very truth, your words are music in my ear."

"I'se glad on it," said Simon with a laugh; "I'se rayther of opinion that it's aboot fost tahme onybody's fun' it oot 'at ah can mak' ony music—"

"Silence, Doctor Holmes!" said Robert in merry mood. "I tell you, you are the best physician that I've seen for many a day. Oh if only I could go and—"

"There!" exclaimed the carpenter, "*that's* why the Lord's browt me to London. Here I is. Send me wheer yo' like. Give me Ned Saltmer's address, and I'll go i' your neeam, an' say, 'Mr. Alfred! if you'll cum wi' me to Sharon Lodge, you'll set your brother Robert on his pins ageean.' He'll cum, I'll warrant yo'!"

"Right, Simon. God has sent you!" said Robert seriously and in faltering tones, and proceeded to write down the exact address which would bring him to honest Ned's cottage.

"Noo, then, good-bye for the prisent, Mr. Robert. Do yo' remember me tellin' yo' o' the ship I saw at Hull with her sails all bellied oot befoore the breeze?"

"Yes, yes!" said Robert fervently, "I know."

"Why, then, efter I'm gone, think o' this, will yo'? Mr. Alfred's fast gettin' hitched on te yo', by the cable o' God's Providence, an' you'll tow him inte harbour at Aspen Garth! Praise the Lord!"

So saying the old man departed on his mission, leaving Robert to sit and wait awhile with the angel Hope seated in his soul, and glowing on his face.

There is no doubt that Ruth Hartgold would in any case have soon recovered from the shock she had received in her singular flight from the balcony, for had she not the 'sweetest of all secrets for a maiden's breast?' Nevertheless the advent of Inez Lanyon was of special value to her. That simple-hearted maiden with the sloe black eyes crept into Ruth's heart at once, and Ruth must have performed a similar feat in her direction, for they soon so far understood each other that Inez discovered her friend's affection for her deliverer: and Inez, little understanding how clearly she was revealing her own heart the while, was never tired of speaking of "Ralph's" manifold excellences and unapproachable virtues.

"How I wish I knew where he is," said she, with a heavy sigh. "What shall we do if we never see him again?"

The 'we' in that sentence was a little bit of innocent sophistry. She could hardly expect Ruth, who never knew him, to feel seriously disturbed if his absence was perpetual;

and though Captain Lanyon esteemed him highly, Inez could hardly expect that he would succumb beneath the sorrow of Alfred's failure to return It would have been the simple truth if the heartless maiden had said, 'What shall *I* do?' but in that case the untold, unacknowledged secret would have stood revealed.

Ruth had not heard, as her father had. that Robert's brother had assumed the name of Ravensworth, or in all probability her int rest would have been thoroughly awakened.

"Nay, nay, cheer up, my dear!" said Ruth. "Never is a long time. The world is not so very big after all; I expect you will come plump on him at some corner where you don't expect him. What did you say his name was?"

"Ralph—Ralph Ravensworth," said Inez, softly and slowly, as though it was a pleasure to linger on the words.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Ruth. "Why, look here!" and drawing from under the pillow of the sofa on which she was seated a weekly serial, she showed her companion a short sketch entitled, "Cast Adrift; an Episode of the Sea, by Ralph Ravensworth."

If there had been any question in Ruth's mind as to the young girl's affection for the owner of that name, it would have been fully answered in her ingenuous blush and trembling fingers, as she took the paper and said—

"Then he hasn't forgotten! Let me read it, dear Ruth."

"Read it aloud, please," said the young Quakeress, with a smile; "I have only seen the title yet."

But that task proved to be beyond the maiden's powers. She had not proceeded far before her tears blurred the page and her voice would not come at call. And no wonder. It was a touchingly written tribute to her own patient cheerfulness during that long exposure on the deep. It told how her pious trust in Providence gave

heart and hope to her stronger and hardier comrades in distress, and exhibited in every line the fact that the writer's heart inspired his pen. After describing the way in which the 'Fairy,' as he called her, sang 'Abide with me' when the shades of night fell on the lonely boat, he had written :—"Dare I hope ever, ever to hear that sweet voice again?" Sympathetic Ruth, who had taken up the paper as soon as Inez had laid it down, could not prevent her tears from flowing to keep the other's company.

Just at that moment Ephraim Hartgold entered the little parlour, Ruth's own peculiar snuggery. Taking Inez by the hand and seating himself by her on the sofa, he drew her to him. There was a winsome gentleness in his tones and words as he said—

"Where is thy father, Inez?—I mean where is Captain Lanyon?"

"My father *is* Captain Lanyon," said Inez, surprised to have the question put in that way; "he has not yet come back from Deal."

"Well, dear maiden," responded he, stroking softly her raven locks, "he hath been as a true and loving parent to thee: and thou wilt ever so regard him I do not doubt. But if it were possible for thee to have another father :— if thy father, thy real father, I—I mean"—the good Quaker was at a loss how to conclude his errand—"I mean, if he whom thou wouldst call thy papa——"

All the years which had sped by since last she had property in that sweet name of her childhood had failed to sponge out its memories or to destroy its charm. She opened her dark eyes wide, turned first pale and then red and then still more pale, and said—

"My papa! Have I a papa?"

"Ha, ha! little maiden," said Ephraim lightly, trying to let her down gently, and to make the revelation as little startling as he could, "it is given to thee to have a papa

and a father both. But spare a little corner of thy heart for Ruth and me."

At that moment Señor Bonanza entered. She looked at the noble countenance for one moment, then his smile, his eyes, his tears were all an evidence that it was he!

"Inez! my darling!" he cried in tones broken with strong feeling. "Come to my heart as a new gift of God! I see your mother, my precious, in every line of your face. Come to me, child, come to the heart of a lonely man whose heart grief it was that he had lost all he loved on earth!"

Inez felt it to be true; for there is a language that speaks far more convincingly than words; that arrives at fact more readily than by signs; and that is the language of intuition, the eloquence of natural affection, when heart speaks to heart and soul to soul. Inez made one glad bound and was clasped in a father's arms!

Señor Bonanza had married the daughter of a Spanish lady who was educated in England, and who during that time resided under the roof of the Hartgolds. For her parents' sake as well as for her own the daughter had been loved with a sincere affection, and the señor and his wife had ever made, in their visits to England, the merchant's house their home. When Ephraim saw Inez on board the *Good Intent* he saw the living image of Isabel Bonanza, and after he had heard her story he felt assured that Inez was her child. No sooner did Señor Bonanza arrive in London, and had communicated with his friends in Spain and Cuba, than he called upon Ephraim Hartgold, and the truth concerning the parentage of the maiden Inez was made as clear as day.

"Papa," said Inez, with her hands clasped lovingly around the neck of her new-found parent, "do you know that I have another father who has been so kind and true, and whom I love so dearly?"

"I know all about it, sweetheart," said her father. "Be very sure that I shall never grudge good Captain Lanyon your love for him. He deserves it all. Indeed, I hope that he may be willing to give up the perils of the sea and be content to dwell with us on shore. I have more than enough for all. Is there any other in whom my darling takes an interest? I should like to celebrate this happy day and show my gratitude to Heaven, by owning and aiding every one who has acted kindly and tenderly to my child."

At this point Ruth, who had been a delighted listener, looked with meaning eyes into Inez's dark orbs. That fair maiden's olive cheeks were suffused with blushes as she bent her head in an agitation that she could not control. Taking advantage of the momentary silence, Ruth handed the magazine they had been reading to the happy and kindly señor, saying with a smile—

"I think there is, sir. If you will just read that brief story it will tell you all about it."

So saying she pointed out to him the touching and thrilling story, 'Cast Adrift; an Episode of the Sea, by Ralph Ravensworth.'

"For 'Fairy' read 'Inez,'" continued Ruth, "and for 'Landyard' read 'Lanyon,' and for 'Shallum' read 'Ravensworth,' and you will not fail to understand."

By this time Señor Bonanza had got into the heart of the story. As he proceeded, Ruth could see the furtive tear coursing down his cheek, while the magazine rustled in his trembling hand.

"The good God bless thee, my daughter!" he said at length, as he kissed her fondly, "and Captain Lanyon, too, who has proved so true and good a teacher of trust in God. As for this young man Ravensworth, tell me where to find him, and it shall go hard with me if I do not prove the depth of my indebtedness to him for the succour and com-

fort he rendered, and for his noble fidelity to my child when in peril on the sea."

Then Inez found her voice.

"Alas, dear papa! I know not where he is; but this I know—that Ralph Ravensworth is worthy of all your thanks and of—of—your esteem."

"I shall find him," said the señor confidently. "Providence will not deprive me of the opportunity to do my duty, nor him of his reward."

Ephraim Hartgold was on the point of speaking, but second thoughts bade him content himself with wondering to what all this might lead.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ALFRED ATHELING IS THE SUBJECT OF STRONG EMOTIONS; AND HUDSON HARVEY, ESQ., M.P., GIVES HIS VERDICT.

"Good name in man or woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls."

Shakespeare.

"Who after his transgression doth repent,
Is halfe, or altogether innocent."

Herrick.

WARM as the welcome was that was given to Alfred Atheling by Ned Saltmer and his excellent wife, it was not warmer than that which the young wanderer was greeted by 'Joss,' whose antics were more expressive of unlimited delight than could be compassed by any language of the tongue. Alfred was fairly dumfoundered with surprise to find his brother's faithful collie from dear old Aspen Garth installed as one of the family in the cottage of Ned Saltmer. That his brother was in town he knew, but that he had traced him to his last shelter before he sailed on the *Boadicea* he did not know, nor that he had taken up his quarters in his own forsaken rooms.

"Why, Joss, old fellow," said Alfred, more than half inclined to take him round the neck and kiss him for the sake of auld lang syne, and to shed a tear in appreciation

of such an effusive welcome, "what in the world are you doing here?"

He could hardly expect to receive a clear and sufficient explanation from Joss's pawings, tail-waggings, tongue-lickings, exultant barks, and nondescript sounds peculiar to dogdom's seasons of delight, so he turned from Joss to Ned, and said—

"Ned, my friend, what in the name of all that's wonderful does this mean?"

"It means," said Ned, nothing loth to be spokesman on such a subject, "that your brother Robert, who is in London on purpose to seek you, has hired these rooms for lodgings for hisself. Just now, however, he's laid up at Sharon Lodge, Wimbledon, recoverin' from an accident he got in savin' a young lady's life."

"So you see," chimed in Madge, "there's plenty o' room for you. He can't use the rooms, so his brother surely may; besides, when he took 'em, I tell'd him that if you should come back, he would ha' to give 'em up again."

For a few moments Alfred looked round in silence, wondering and pondering, and then he asked how Robert managed to find that Ned Saltmer's cottage had been his home. While Ned was explaining, Alfred's eye lighted on the bag which lay upon the corner of the mantelpiece, partially hidden by a highly coloured and remarkably shaped equestrian figure made of pottery and touched up with sundry spots of paint.

"What's this?" said he, jumping to his feet, for there was no mistaking either the brown bag or the green tape. As he took it in his hands, he could hardly wrap his fingers round it for excitement. He raised his voice into a loud falsetto, and looking at Ned with widely open eyes, he said—

"For God's sake, dear Ned! Tell me how you have come by this?"

"Why, do you know it?" said Ned and Madge in the same breath.

"Know it!" said Alfred, as pale as a ghost the while. "I've good reason to know it. That's the bag that has cost me all my misery, and all through the accursed folly of putting an enemy into my mouth to steal away my brains."

"Are you sure?" said Ned, who could not get over his surprise.

"That bag," said Alfred, "belongs to Mr. Hudson Harvey, my employer. It was given to me to take to the Bank one morning, when I had asked for and got a holiday for the day. I and Harold Spofforth met a friend and we had some champagne together, and what became of it after I have never known from that day to this. I can remember now cutting off that very piece of tape, because it struck me that it was rather broad for such a purpose. You see the letters H. H. printed on the side. Here are two faint slanting lines drawn between the limbs of each letter, making A. A. which stands for Alfred Atheling, and which I did in an idle moment with my own pen, while Mr. Harvey was making up his accounts. I can swear to it in any court in England!"

Full of astonishment, for he had not got far in his readings of the 'dovetailings of God's providences,' Ned informed Alfred where he got it, and how Joss, clever and faithful Joss, had been in reality the finder of the treasure-trove, now far more precious than all the gold the bag contained.

"You've made it clear enough," said Ned, "as to the bag, what do you propose to do?"

"Do?" said Alfred, half beside himself with joy, and unable to keep back the tears that gushed like rain. I shall go to Mr. Harvey's, whose confidence I so wickedly forfeited, confess my fault, and restore to him his own again. Whatever else comes of it, one thing will be made clear at any

rate, that Alfred Atheling could never stoop so low as to be a thief. Oh, my dear friends! Help me to thank God for this amazing mercy! I've well deserved all that I have suffered and more; I've sinned against Heaven and against man, but thank God, the name of my honoured parents and my noble brother Robert is saved from this crowning shame!"

Alfred spoke under the influence of an excitement so strong that it overpowered him. It was pitiful to see him. He became hysterical. He laughed and cried by turns. Then after awhile he jumped to his feet and said, "Now I can meet my brother Robert! Now I can go to my mother in open day! Oh, if I had only known this, I would not have spurned the kindly advances of dear Simon Holmes. He little knew how dearly I should have liked to ask him for his blessing and his prayers!"

This mention of Simon Holmes brought a leading question from Ned Saltmer, who greatly esteemed his old master: and that led Alfred to tell the story of his morning's ride from Chilworth, which helped to calm him and bring his agitated feelings under control.

"Dear old Simon!" said Ned. "I should like to see him. I wish you'd browt him here."

Nothing would do for Alfred but that he must go that very evening to seek an interview with his late employer. He was fortunate enough to find the busy and popular M.P. at home. He did not recognise the footman who opened the door for him. But he noticed that when he gave his name the footman surveyed him from head to foot with a look that made Alfred's cheek to tingle with the blush of shame. He was shown into the well-remembered library, in which he had often sat while conducting his master's correspondence, and there he waited, waited with a beating heart and an anxiety that cannot be measured for the coming of the man whom he had greatly wronged.

By-and-by, Mr. Hudson appeared. A certain sternness sat upon his features, and there was a searching light in his blue eye as he looked upon his defaulting secretary, who rose to his feet to meet him as he entered, holding out to him the bag of gold. Alfred could not speak. There was a lump in his throat that forbade him. He simply held the bag out with one hand, and covered his eyes with the other to veil the starting tears, and said never a word.

"Why, what's this?" said Mr. Harvey, with real wonder as he took the bag into his hands. "Do you mean to say that this is the gold you—*lost?*"

In that supreme moment, and with that picture of real grief before him, he could not say 'stole,' and so he said 'lost' instead.

"God in heaven bless you for that word, Mr. Harvey!" said Alfred, dashing the tears impatiently from his eyes. "Yes—lost—not stole, as there is a heaven above me and a God who reads my heart! Base and bad I was, sir, a wicked and slothful servant: all the more wicked that you treated me with such unmeasured kindness: but never so vile as to embezzle my master's gold. Believe that, sir; and do with me what you will!"

Alfred bowed his head and stood with hands folded on his breast, waiting, with all his senses tightly strung, till the verdict should be pronounced.

"With all my heart I would wish to believe it," said Mr. Harvey. "That would be a far greater pleasure to me than the return of the gold, even if I had not already received it. Nay, nay," he continued, rightly construing and completely overcome by the soul hunger that looked through Alfred's eyes, "I do believe it. Sit down and tell me how you lost it, and how it has come into your hands again."

"How and where I lost it I cannot tell you. To the best of my belief I was all but, if not entirely, intoxicated before I parted with it. I have sometimes thought that I must

have gambled with it while out of my proper mind, or that I had been unwittingly drugged that it might be easily stolen. I do not know. But I can tell you how by a strange hap I found it."

Straightway he narrated all that he had heard from Ned Saltmer.

"And now," he continued, "that in God's goodness to me, I am able to bring it again, so far as I know, absolutely intact, will you forgive me for my shameful wrong-doing? Believe me, sir, I bitterly repent, and that from the day I fled to avoid the penalties of the law until now, I have endeavoured to do right."

Mr. Harvey gave him his hand.

"Alfred," said he, "I believe you; let me go further and say that I now believe *in* you, and that all that is past I forgive and forget. Your love and service to my dear lamented son has never been forgotten; and even had you in an evil moment given way to temptation and appropriated the money, yet if you had returned to me and penitently confessed it, for his sake I would have said, as my Master in heaven would, 'Thy sin is forgiven thee: go in peace, and sin no more.' With all my soul, I thank God for you that you are free from guilt in this matter. But have you had no communication with your elder brother? Soon after you left he called here and paid me the whole amount. This money, therefore, is his, not mine. The bag is mine," he continued with a smile; "that *you* shall keep as a memento of an episode which God's Providence has controlled for your best advantage,—out of evil still educing good."

"I have not seen my brother," said Alfred, "neither have I had any intercourse with my family; nor did I ever intend to link their name again with my dishonoured fortunes. Now, however, I know that he is in London, and shall at once proceed, unless you think well to take charge of it, to

hand the money over to him and return with him to Aspendale to throw myself at my mother's feet."

Here again Alfred's self-command forsook him, and he wept bitterly.

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Harvey, thoroughly understanding the spirit that prompted the suggestion concerning the money; "take it yourself. It will be a happy meeting both for you and him."

Again renewing his assurance that he had won the olden confidence and regard, the worthy M.P. dismissed him; and with a strangely lightened heart and chastened spirit Alfred returned to the cottage of Ned Saltmer. The night was clear and fine as Alfred paced the London streets on his homeward way, and the very stars seemed to look down upon him with hope-inspiring beams as he said to himself—

"Once again I am an Atheling; and God is good."

When he arrived at Ned's bright and cheery cottage he let himself in with his latch-key and strode with a firm elated step into the kitchen, and there he met with a new surprise, for seated in the chimney corner, he recognised his persistent fellow-passenger in the express train, good, honest, and every way worthy Simon Holmes.

The old carpenter rose from his place and stept forward with beaming smile and outstretched hand.

"God bless yo', Mr. Alfred!" said he. "The seet o' your feeace yance ageean warms mah te me varry heart! Shak' hands wi' mah, dear laddie, for auld lang syne."

"That will I, Simon," said Alfred, and taking the old man's hand with his own left hand, he laid his right hand in the carpenter's horny palm, saying as well as he could for the surging sobs that hindered speech—

"I dare to let it lie in a good man's hand now, for the evil stain that was on it is washed away, and—"

"Thenk God!" said Simon, whose sympathetic tears

were on his cheeks the while, "weshed oot i' the Foontain 'at's oppen for ivery yan on us at the Cross o' Jesus. That's it, isn't it, Mr. Alfred?"

The question came as a surprise. Alfred's words had mainly to do with Mr. Harvey's recovered faith and confidence. Simon's question made him think; made him remember that the moral washing was after all the greater need; made him examine his own heart. He paused a moment, thought upon his Saviour, felt that 'old things had passed away, that all things had become new,' and said with bended head and in low earnest tones—

"Simon Holmes! I hope and believe it is!"

Ned Saltmer and tender-hearted Madge felt the power and meaning of those words, and there were four earnest worshippers bending before the Throne of Grace when Simon Holmes knelt reverently, saying—

"Let us pray!"



CHAPTER XXXVIII.

EPHRAIM HARTGOLD FINDS HIMSELF IN A QUANDARY; AND ROBERT ATHELING THINKS HIMSELF IN PARADISE.

"True love's the gift which God hath given
To man alone beneath the heaven.
It is the secret sympathy,
The silver link, the silken tie,
Which heart to heart, and mind to mind,
In body and in soul can bind."

Scott.

ROBERT ATHELING'S enforced residence under Ephraim Hartgold's roof, although it chafed and fretted him, at any rate until the unexpected advent of Simon Holmes upon the scene, had one very definite advantage. It enabled him to see Ruth Hartgold, the fair young Quakeress, as she really was: a very desirable thing on the part of anybody, man or woman, who is on marriage thoughts intent. In Ruth's case, to see her as she really was, was to see her at her best, which, alas, is not by any means so true generally as might be desired.

She was true to her training in one grand respect, at any rate. Though she certainly rebelled against drab raiment, she was very, very seldom anything other than her real self, and had but little to do with seeming, either within doors or out.

It does not follow that this is always a special virtue, for there are too many people both among young men and maidens, who although they are 'natural,' are naturally unpleasant, uninteresting, and uncongenial. In that case a little seeming in the right direction would be decidedly to their advantage and to other people's comfort. But in the case of many, very many, thank goodness, to be natural is to be nice. These are the true brighteners of life in all circles. Such an one was Ruth Hartgold; and this, Robert Atheling, honest, shrewd, true-hearted yeoman as he was, came full soon to see.

Said Ephraim Hartgold when he invited Robert to his hospitable mansion, "The house and anything therein is at thy disposal." Now as he lay upon the sofa day by day till his several wounds and bruises were sufficiently healed to warrant his departure, he did covet with all his heart one article that Sharon Lodge contained, and knew full well how to dispose of it if he could only secure its transfer to himself. Ruth's piquant beauty was rendered even more attractive by its plain and unadorned setting: by the deft and quiet way in which she went about her household duties, and by the delicate and sympathetic fashion in which she acted as nurse and companion to himself. All this spoke directly to the head and heart of the sensible Robert. If head and heart always conducted the search together when a wife or a husband is in quest, there would be fewer marriages whose main results are sorrow, misery, and regret. The stalwart young farmer had a wonderful contempt for frills and frippery which would have neutralised any attractions which their weak-minded wearers suppose them to adorn.

The quiet maiden's manners and bearing, the furniture of her mind, and the evidences of her true character, were matters for his continual study. In social converse Ruth was not absolutely dumb, as some young women are, who

knowing nothing, can say nothing,—can only sit and simper and utter occasional brief interjections just to show that they are alive. On the other hand, as one might predict of a girl with a Quaker training, Ruth was not continually talking, was not that irritating entity, a wordy woman. She did not, as too many fair maidens do, flow forth in gushing speech, the sense and worth of which is in inverse proportion to its fervour and continuity. This kind of creature is even more unbearable than the other.

Had Ruth been a member of either class, it is certain that our young and sturdy Saxon would have returned to his paternal acres both heart-whole and fancy free. As it was, he was simply over head and ears in love, and spent a good many of his convalescent hours in endeavouring to decide how best to put matters to downright Ephraim, and the equally straightforward Keturah, so as not to risk a refusal. Of Ruth the young fellow had reasons of his own for feeling thoroughly secure: but he was well aware that he would not be able to carry off the prize unless he could count on securing a triple vote.

One evening when Ruth had gone out, with her young friend and favourite Inez, on some mysterious errand to the draper's, with which the sterner sex are supposed to have nothing to do except when the bill comes in, and when Ephraim and Keturah were his sole companions in the cosy sitting-room, Robert resolved to break the ice and make the plunge necessary to bring matters to an issue. He hoped to find the ice thin; but he had a natural fear as to the temperature of the water when the deed was done.

"I feel," he said, suddenly changing the current and ordinary topics of conversation, "that I shall never be able to express my deep sense of your kindness to me while—"

"Then thee had better leave it untold," said Ephraim promptly. "Keturah and I feel exactly like thee on that

point. Our debt to thee would put thine to us so far into the shade, that it will be a real relief to us both if thou wilt be good enough not to challenge the comparison. Words are but poor materials when the heart desires to speak, and a father's and a mother's heart, whose greatest riches are an only child saved from a cruel fate by—"

Here Ephraim Hartgold the hard-headed merchant came to a full stop by reason of a certain difficulty of speech that was greater than he could well manage. Keturah would fain have come to the help of her husband as in duty bound; but all that she could do was to take off her glasses and rub them carefully, though why she should do that I cannot tell; for the dimness was certainly not on them, but on the gentle and kindly grey eyes behind them, which were just then so blurred as to make clear vision quite an impossibility.

"Don't," said Robert, waving down with his hand all attempt to continue in that groove. "You make it harder for me to say what I want to say: for indeed, indeed I do not ask it by way of reward."

Then prosecuting his enterprise in what is ever the best and weightiest fashion, he simply went direct to the point with his heart upon his lips—

"The simple fact is," dear friends, "that I love Ruth Hartgold as my life. Will you spare her to me for my wife?"

We may be quite sure that Robert Atheling had no intention just then of making poetry. But from the beginning until now, love is supposed to be strong in the poetic element, and so his odd way of putting it may be taken as a token that he had the genuine afflatus. The calm and sedate Keturah did not seem to be astonished by this frank avowal. Mothers as a rule seem to have intuitions on such subjects that far out-travel the duller minds of their spouses. Ephraim on the other hand was taken by surprise, which

shows that, like Mary in the sacred story, Keturah had been content to ponder these things in her heart.

"Thy wife, Robert Atheling!" said the Quaker. "Nay, that cannot be. The maiden has been as good as promised to her cousin Paul, who is at this time in Chicago, where he is transacting business for our firm, and who is to be my partner and successor. He is a good youth and a clever and hath a comely countenance."

By this time the blur had passed away from Keturah's eyes, at least so much so as to enable her to see the look of blank distress which sat on Robert's pallid face. It was not in her woman's heart to sit unmoved. She had long since divined Robert's passionate love for the maiden whose life he had saved. She had seen, too, not without some dismay, Ruth's evident tenderness for him, and for the life of her she could not help taking sides with them both. She glanced at her noble husband, who was looking at her with disturbed and anxious eyes, stroking his white hair down upon his forehead as he always did when stirred and troubled.

"It hath troubled me greatly," Keturah said quietly, "that our daughter hath never taken kindly to Paul's wooing, and for that matter the youth himself hath displayed but little eagerness. Perhaps it may be because he hath learnt to become assured of her."

That last limb of the sentence was a wonderfully clever diplomatic stroke. Its effect on Ephraim was to make him open his eyes and his mouth, as he felt a suspicion that a mere family arrangement might not be sufficient to settle so important a matter to everybody's satisfaction, and that the little heart that beat so strongly under Ruth's bodice might prove a protesting party. Robert fixed his eyes on Keturah, looked the thanks he could not speak, and said—

"Eagerness! O Mrs. Hartgold, I could die for her!"

"Thou didst do so, or very nearly," said Keturah in

strong agitation. Verily thou didst redeem her from death at great cost!"

Ephraim Hartgold was a strong man as well as a good one; he had a strong will as well as a kind one: but he felt that in the presence of such a combination 'his strength was as tow.' He was still stroking his hair as if he was trying to force inspiration on the knotty point by means of friction when the individual more nearly concerned, the fair young Quakeress herself, entered the room. At one glance the clever maiden took in the whole scene and read its meaning clearly without need of words. First, she blushed red as any poppy with which her namesake might have adorned her hair in the cornfields of Boaz in the olden time. Then there came a pallor on her cheeks that told how greatly she was concerned as to the possible issues of that conversation; and then, with one keen, searching, and appealing look into her honoured father's eyes, she turned and silently left the room.

In that glance of Ruth's, which went right into the secret chambers of his soul, honest and tender-hearted Ephraim read a whole three-volume novel of information on a subject to which he had given not much more than a passing thought. He could not resist it. He followed his darling out of the room and found her in the drawing-room looking steadily at nothing through the window, and doubtless seeing nothing— nothing, that is to say, with her eyes; but still looking steadily with her mental vision at that suggestive picture in the parlour which she had just seen.

"Dear Ruth," said her father, quietly and tenderly, "answer thy father two questions directly from thy heart."

The first question had to do with her cousin Paul, and the answer was a decided 'No.' The second question had to do with Robert Atheling, and the answer was a soft half-whispered 'Yes,' which made Ruth's pale cheeks to assume the rosiest red. What the questions were may be fairly

understood. Suffice it to say, that a little later in the evening Ephraim and Keturah had engagements otherwhere, and that Boaz and Ruth were left alone, and did not sigh for the companionship of any living soul. I think it is likely that Keturah had given Ephraim an intimation that, at least on *this* rare occasion, his room would be regarded as being better than his company.

> "Love is master of all arts,
> And puts it into human hearts
> The strangest things to say and do,"

says the poet Longfellow, and no doubt it was as well they were alone.

When Robert Atheling stood by the bedside of his dying father, and had given his solemn promise to fulfil his last request, the dying saint had said—

"God bless thee, my son. The God of thy fathers bless thee. Now, Robert, I die content. As for thee, thine shall be the best of blessings from the hand of God."

The best of blessings. Robert Atheling looked upon the upturned face of the sweet maiden at his side, his plighted love, and knew that his aged father's prediction had come true. He was in the cue to quote the 'poet of all time' and say—

> "Why, man, she is mine own!
> And I as rich in having such a jewel,
> As twenty seas, if all their sands were pearl,
> The water nectar, and the rocks pure gold."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HAROLD SPOFFORTH MAKES A PAINFUL DISCOVERY; AND INEZ BONANZA BECOMES A GUEST AT ASPEN TOWERS.

"The dawn is overcast, the morning lowers,
And heavily in clouds brings on the day."

Addison.

"Death lies on her, like an untimely frost
Upon the sweetest flower of all the field."

Shakespeare.

IN two households of Thorpe Aspen there was exceeding gratitude and joy. That wondrous outcome of civilisation, the penny post, which distributes so much of daily joy and sorrow over the wide area subject to its influence, had both at Aspen Towers and Aspen Garth brought brightness to the hearthstones so long shrouded in unlifted gloom. Ethel Spofforth's ready and triumphant pen had informed her father that Harold the waif and wanderer was clothed and in his right mind; was with her in London; that he was about to return with her to his long neglected sire and his long forgotten home.

Sir Godwin, thanks to Clara Atheling's diligent and tender care, and to the new peace and strength that had come into his soul, was still cheerfully and hopefully bearing the absence of his darling Ethel; but this letter, with its

pleasant news of Harold, almost rejuvenated him, so great was his delight. He found plenty of employment for Clara and for everybody else at the Towers in getting things arranged and making special preparations for a vigorous welcome on the happy day when his son and daughter should again dwell in peace beneath his roof.

At Aspen Garth matters had not yet reached so definite a phase of expectation and preparation. Still the Widow Atheling's ageing features wore a new glow, and were oft irradiated by the pleasant smile which used to be there so constantly, but which, since the sad absence of her youngest born, had only come like angels' visits, few and far between.

The little household knew now that Alfred's character, so far as the eyes of men were concerned, was cleared of its greatest stain; they knew, moreover, that though his whereabouts was unknown he was still in the flesh; that his life and conduct, as judged from the writings of 'Ralph Ravensworth,' were all that could be desired; and they had good reason for believing that by-and-by, when Robert was able to travel northward, he would be able to crown their hope with full fruition and bring the wanderer home again.

The sympathetic villagers of Thorpe Aspen seemed to entertain a common feeling of pleasant anticipation. Tim Crouch, who felt as though he had a hand in it, part of the *dramatis personæ*, as one may say, and who longed for the return of Jack Benson that he might tell him how faithful he had been to his trust, hammered away at his lapstone, sang a jovial song, and much to the laborious Sallie's satisfaction, kept away alike from the 'Chequers' and the King's Head. The fact is, that Alfred Atheling's brief residence beneath his roof had been of great moral service to the cobbler; and he was determined that when Alfred did return, he should find him sober and acknowledge his friendship without a blush. He even went so far as to endeavour to impress the propriety of a change of conduct

on Sam Vause; but that bibulous blacksmith was too far gone, I fear, so that he looked forward to the return of the two young men as affording a fair and reasonable excuse for a prolonged and intimate interview with John Barleycorn. Even Peter Prout the miller felt constrained, if not to hold his gossiping tongue, at anyrate to give his gossip a more mild and respectable flavour.

"Ah'll tell yo' what it is, Tim," said he to the cobbler one day when Tim had come to the mill for a couple of stones of flour, "we'll gi' them young chaps a welcum sitch as Thorpe Aspin hezn't seen for a munth o' Sundays. It's nowt but right we sud, beeath for Sir Godwin an' Mrs. Atheling's sake. Ah meean te shut up t' mill an' hev a halida'. Hey, though t' wind may be strang aneeaf te tonn all t' mill steeans an' work t' beean crusher inte t' barga'n."

When Ethel Spofforth and her brother put up at the hotel in London, it was entirely on Ethel's account that they did not at once proceed to Thorpe Aspen. This she would fain have done, but her physical strength, never really robust since that strange illness out of which faith and prayer had brought her, was sadly shaken by the excitement of the last few weeks.

"We will wait here a few days, Harold, dear," she said to her brother. "I feel that I am not equal to so long a journey. I will rest quietly here for a while, and you can take the opportunity of calling on any old friends for whom you care."

"I had no friends, dear sister, when I was in London, so there cannot be any old friends now; and my acquaintances were such that, God helping me, I will never resume them nor seek their like again. In all this, however, I make one exception; I would give much and go far to find Alfred Atheling. I wonder where he is or what has become of him."

"I think he was your friend, Harold; at least you always seemed to like him from a boy, and I know he cared for you."

"That he did, sister. More's the pity," he replied. "Alfred Atheling's ruin, if he is ruined, which God forbid, lies at my door. May God forgive me! There is nothing upon earth I would not do; there is no place on earth to which I would not go; I think there is little that I would not suffer, if I might lay my hand upon his shoulder, ask his forgiveness, and try to lead him back again into the paths from which both of us wandered so long and so far."

There was that in the tone of Harold's voice that displayed how deep were his feelings on this subject. Had she needed convincing as to the genuine character of her brother's reformation it would have been sufficient to have heard him now.

"At present, however, my dear sister, to whom I owe a debt such as I can never repay, my duty is by your side. Rest awhile, and then you shall go with me to gladden the old man's heart by saying, 'Father, Harold's come home!'"

But Ethel did not get any better. She was tired, always tired,—tired when she went to bed at night, tired when she arose in the morning, tired and listless, feeble and faint at noon-day. One morning after a restless and unrefreshing night, Ethel joined her brother at the breakfast table with cheeks so pale, lips so white, rings around her eyes so dark, and she entered the room with a step so slow and feeble, that Harold started from his chair at the sight of her and helped her to her place.

In that moment the scales had fallen from his eyes. The truth had dawned upon him at last that his sister's "weariness after travel" would not pass away with rest, unless it was the repose of the quiet grave.

"Don't be alarmed, Harold, dear," she said, with a reassuring smile. "I was afraid you would notice something

wrong this morning; for to tell you the truth, I am far from well. I shall be better, no doubt, after I have had a cup of tea."

The breakfast passed almost in silence. Ethel was doing her best to seem to eat, in her brother's presence, but it was a pitiful effort at deception. Harold was silenced by the awful oppression of his new-born fears. When the table was cleared and the two were left alone, Ethel said—

"Harold, dear, you must not feel alarmed or sad by what I am going to tell you. All is right. All is as it should be—all is well. I feel that my mission is almost over. I have been right down to the brink and border of the grave before, so that I know all about it; and I do not fear it any more than I fear putting my head upon my pillow. My Saviour, in answer to prayer, raised me from the bed of death that I might have the joy of bringing you home, dear brother. So you see there is no need of any regrets on your part, for if it had not been for you I should never have left my sick-bed alive. You and I won't talk about this any more now, Harold. We understand each other. Now we must go home at once. I thought I shou'd be better able to travel if I rested; but it is not so, and we had better not delay. Remember we are going to cheer our father in his weakness and age, and I shall expect you, dear boy, to take your cue from me. If ever you see me tearful, sorrowful, unhappy, why I will let you follow suit; but until then, for dear father's sake, cheerfulness is to be the order of the day."

So saying Harold was dismissed with a light laugh and a lifted finger to make preparations for their departure to the north. Poor Harold was obedient—he could not trust himself to try his voice, lest he should break down altogether. But when he had found Jacob Benson, more than ever thankful now that he had not sent that faithful

servant home before, he told him the sad story, to which honest Jacob could only answer—

"Then the sun's going out o' heaven, an' t' summer's going out o' t' year. That's all I can say;" and stalwart Jacob made his way to some quiet corner to have it out with himself.

Meanwhile Ethel, nerving herself as usual for the duty that lay next her, went about her preparations with a feeble frame made strong by a noble purpose and an indomitable faith.

In the evening Señor Bonanza called, bringing his new-found daughter Inez with him to introduce her to his friends and fellow-travellers. The señor was painfully struck with the change which a few short days had made in the appearance of the amiable and gentle Ethel. With the courtesy and delicacy peculiar to his race, and still more peculiar to himself, he suppressed his feelings, said but little on that or kindred subjects, and instead went off into a silver stream of cheerful talk about his new-found darling, who certainly at that moment looked as well worth finding as any diamond picked out of Brazilian sands.

The rich dark eyes of the young Creole were lifted to the gentle orbs of Ethel, fairly lustrous with sympathy and liking. She had heard from her father the whole story of Ethel's sisterly search for her brother, and to see her now, in the joy of full success, evidently fading out of life, touched the maiden to the heart. As soon as it was known that Ethel was to take her long journey into Yorkshire on the following day, Inez went over to her and kissed her, as she said, softly—

"May I go with you? You are not fit to go so far without a female friend; and I do love you. Oh, if I might!"

"You certainly may, dear, and what is more, I shall be very grateful, for I am sure you will help me to bear the journey more bravely. When I prayed this morning for

strength to travel, it was in my mind to ask for such a friend; but I did not dare to seem to dictate to my Heavenly Father. O dear Inez! do you see how much better He is than all our fears, and does more abundantly for us than we can ask or think; for certainly I never hoped for such a companion as you. Besides, it will do my father good to hear Señor Bonanza talk of Harold and his kindness to him in the brigand's cave."

"What are you two young ladies discussing there so earnestly and pleasantly?" said the señor, with a smile. "Or is it a secret that cannot be told?"

"No, papa, it is a secret that can be told now. You told me you would do anything I ask you, and I have found out now what I want."

"What is thy request, and I will give it, to the half of my kingdom—or the whole of it, for that matter, little sweetheart?" It is as well, perhaps, that the latter part of the sentence was *sotto voce*, for the maiden's sake.

"I want to go with Miss Spofforth to Yorkshire," said Inez, "because she ought not to travel without a lady friend, and I want you to go with me."

"And *we* both want *you* both," said Ethel with a little ripple of laughter—"Don't we, Harold?"

Harold heartily joined in the request, and the matter was settled to everybody's content. So the visitors left immediately and repaired to Sharon Lodge to make preparations for the journey, having promised to be at the hotel in time for Inez to join her friend at the outset of the journey. With the events that occurred that night at Sharon Lodge we shall have to deal by-and-by.

In the morning the señor and Inez appeared at the hotel according to promise; but there was a new light in the eye of maiden Inez, a new glow on her cheek and at her heart. These contrasted sadly with the pallor on Ethel's face and the tokens of weakness that told so

emphatic a story of the inroads that disease was making in that fair and feeble form. So is it ever in this world of changes, contrasts, and inequalities. Happy are they who have within them that heaven-born philosophy which makes them rise superior to all the ebbs and flows of fortune ; because they have a steady and steadfast sense of security and peace through a pious confidence in Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,—an unchangeable and omnipotent Helper and Friend.

Thanks very greatly to the tender care and happy resources of Inez, Ethel was enabled to bear the tedious journey better than might have been expected, and in due time the whole party arrived at Chilworth station, and were driven in the baronet's roomiest and easiest carriage direct to the portals of Aspen Towers. I shall not attempt to describe the meeting of the aged and crippled baronet with his darling daughter and his long absent and now penitent son. The old man's feeble frame could scarcely support the rush of feeling that all but overcame him as he took them to his heart.

While Clara Atheling was looking at Ethel with a sinking heart, and was thinking that she had only come home to die, Ethel was looking at her father and thinking as she gazed upon his worn and weary features that it was a question which of them should first be laid at rest beside her mother in the little chancel of Thorp Aspen Church. With her, however, there was no sorrow, only peace and hope ; peace in the consciousness that both she and her father were well lodged in their Heavenly Father's keeping ; hope that Harold had before him a career of honour and service in dear Aspendale, which should be bettered and benefited by the commanding Christian influence of the heir of Aspen Towers.

"Father, I thank thee," said she in her heart. "It was worth living for. It is worth dying for. All is well."

Kind and thoughtful Clara, with her strong will, ready wit, and quick resources, was thoroughly equal to the occasion. After she had properly bestowed her guests, and had seen Sir Godwin safe to his nightly rest, she repaired to Ethel's chamber to compare notes with her as to God's gracious dealings alike with Alfred and Harold. Together they returned thanks to the God that hears and answers prayer. When Clara had retired, Ethel lay thinking, thinking as usual, for others, thinking now how well it would be if Harold could keep Clara at Aspen Towers as its mistress and his own helpmeet in the good work which was given to him, and which he now had the heart to do.



CHAPTER XL.

ROBERT ATHELING SPEAKS IN 'BROAD YORKSHIRE;' AND SIMON HOLMES TAKES UP A FAVOURITE TOPIC.

"The atmosphere
Breathes rest, comfort, and the many chambers
Seem full of welcomes."

Longfellow.

"Good man, be not cast down, thou yet art right:
Cheer up, hold out, with thee it shall go well."

Bunyan.

THE shades of evening were gathering around the hospitable mansion of the Quaker merchant, when the servant brought the intelligence to the party in the cosy sitting-room that some persons had asked to see Robert Atheling on special business of importance. They had declined to send in any further message than that they had come far to see him, and that they were sure he would be glad to give then an interview if he knew their errand.

Robert was always thinking more or less about his brother Alfred, and he instantly jumped at the conclusion that this visit was connected somehow with his brother's fortunes. He was now able to move about with the aid of a stick and a friendly arm. So, at Ephraim Hartgold's sug-

gestion, he went into the merchant's private sanctum to receive his visitors.

In the sitting-room he had left were assembled Ephraim and Keturah, together with Ruth, his own darling Ruth, and also Señor Bonanza and sweet Inez, whose heart had just been made happier by two events,—the permission to accompany Ethel Spofforth to Yorkshire, and the unexpected arrival of Captain Lanyon, who was 'berthed,' as he would have called it, by the 'cabin' fire. These Robert left behind. Whom would he find waiting for his coming?

"Hallo, Ned Saltmer!" said he, seizing the hand of the honest artizan. "I'm glad to see you. How is my good friend Madge?"

But by this time, Joss, who had no notion of being second in any welcome from his beloved master, placed his forefeet on his knee, and gave one, two, three joyous little barks, wagging his tail the while, as though he would employ both ends of himself to win the recognition he desired.

"Why, Joss! Joss, dear old friend! The sight of you is enough to make one homesick with a vengeance."

And in very effusive fashion indeed did these two demonstrate their mutual opinions that 'auld acquaintance should never be forgot.'

The second visitor was good Simon Holmes, who looked so ludicrously happy standing there by the door, hat in one hand and running the fingers of the other through his long grey hair, his eyebrows arched to the uttermost, and a smile upon his face that took up the whole area and seemed to spread itself over his entire person.

"Why, Simon!" said Robert, "if I might venture to predict what you wish to say by how you look, I should prophesy that you have something pleasant to tell me. Is it the best news, dear old friend?"

"The varry best, Mister Robert, the varry best of all,

But ah doan't think ah cud get it oot withoot chooakin', an' seea him 'at's browt it had better tell yo' his-sen."

Standing aside, he made room for the approach of a tall gentlemanly looking youth who had stood back in the shade. His auburn hair was cut short so that the native tendency to curl was not permitted to assert itself. He had a somewhat flourishing moustache that did assert itself effectively. His face was brown and sunburnt, but the blue eyes could not be disguised.

"Robert! brother Robert!" said he, stepping forward. "Will you, can you, give me welcome? See here!" he continued, holding forth the bag of gold with the familiar H. H. stamped thereon—"at least believe me that your unworthy brother never stooped to be a thief."

"Alf! my brother Alf! Now, God be praised!" said Robert, and rising from his seat, utterly forgetful of his own unstable limbs, he literally fell upon his neck and kissed him. "O Alf! Alf! Alf! how this will bring the sunshine back to Aspen Garth! Surely our sainted father in his home in heaven sees this happy, happy hour!"

It was a sight to see the strong, staid, sedate Robert Atheling weeping like a schoolboy, fondling the repentant youth as if he had been a child, and all the while talking half incoherently of 'father,' 'mother,' 'Alf, dear Alf!' mingled with ejaculations of gratitude to God. Ned Saltmer would have given a trifle to have had his white apron at command, for the honest fellow's tender heart was a fountain unsealed; the old carpenter's big coloured cotton handkerchief was in constant requisition, and the way in which he proclaimed that it must be a catarrhal affection that troubled him would have done no discredit to a regimental trumpeter with special strength of lung!

"Ha, ha, Mr. Robert! O, O Mr. Alfred!" said he, half laughing, half crying, and altogether beside himself with joy. "Ah tell'd yo', ah tell'd yo', ah allus tell'd yo' that

God was as good as His wod! Oh, if nobbut ah'd a pair o' wings! ah wad flee te Aspen Garth like a swallo' an' mak' your mother t' happiest woman i' Christendom. Ned Saltmer, my lad, give us hod o' your hand!"

Ned Saltmer did as he was requested, but it may well be doubted that he wished it back in his own keeping, for he got such a lesson in the art of hand-shaking on that occasion that in the way of doing it vigorously he felt that there was little more to learn. Ned began to wish that Simon was a 'swallow' that that exercise in gymnastics might be shortened.

Joss appeared to understand matters perfectly, and behaved himself accordingly. He knew it was not the time just then for any boisterous demonstrations of doggish delight; so he contented himself with standing unbidden on his hind legs, as his master had taught him in the days of puppyhood, uttering every now and then a sympathetic whimper, showing his white teeth as though on the borders of a fit of laughter; for with dogs as with human beings, smiles and tears are close allied.

In a little while the reunited brothers were enabled to engage in comparatively quiet converse, and then, of course, the family of Robert's host must be made partakers of the joyful news.

"Noo, Alf, laddie!" said Robert, subsiding in real glee into the broadest dialect of Aspendale, "Len' ma' thee aym, an' gi' ma' a lift back ageean inte t' parlor."

Robert could have spoken double Dutch just then. Into the sitting-room went the two happy brothers, followed by Ned and Simon and Joss, who were not to be deprived of the luscious gladness of the hour. On their appearance there, two things happened right off.

The maiden Inez gave a little scream and conveniently swooned on the breast of Ruth, by whose side she sat, and Captain Lanyon, jumping to his feet, exclaimed—

"Well, here's a sight for sore eyes! Mr. Ravensworth! God bless your body an' soul, man. Where in the world have you been?" And no sooner had Alfred safely placed his brother on the sofa, than the warm-hearted tar seized his liberated hand and gave him a true sailor's grip.

Miss Inez's swoon was not of long duration. How could it be, when there was so much that it was worth the while coming quickly round again to see. Alfred's greeting of the worthy captain was warm enough; but as soon as he saw him, his eyes went in search of Inez, and resting on her pallid features, were not to be again withdrawn. If Señor Bonanza was at all quick in reading the secrets of the heart, he certainly could not be at any loss to interpret the light that shone from the dark orbs of his daughter or from the eyes of rich Saxon blue with which her lover sought to read her soul.

"O Mr. Ravensworth!" said Inez, "I was afraid we were never going to see you again." That 'we' did not show so much simplicity, after all.

It was now Señor Bonanza's turn. Alfred thought he had never seen any nobler or more winsome features in living man than those that met his gaze when that gentleman rose from his place, pushed back from his brow his whitening hair, took Alfred's two hands in his, and said—

"This, then, is the young gentleman who behaved so tenderly and helpfully to my darling daughter during that terrible time when she was in peril on the sea! Permit me, Mr. Ravensworth, to tender you a father's thanks—"

"But I don't understand," said Alfred, thoroughly mystified, "Captain Lanyon—"

"Is her father yet!" said the captain stoutly, "and is going to be, but the Señor Bonanza is her 'papa,' so we go shares, don't you see?"

It is unnecessary to repeat all the explanations and interchanges of information that marked that memorable evening.

Suffice it to say, that eventually all was made clear to each. The night closed on a happy and thoughtful party, whose foremost thought and feeling was that of thankfulness to an overruling Providence who had brought so much good out of evil, and out of a cloud so dark had educed so bright a light.

Ephraim Hartgold, though by no means easily moved from the even current of his ways, was moved to propose that they should kneel in silent prayer. He himself was the first to break the silence and to pour out their common thanks in simple and earnest prayer to the good God that is over all. He was followed by Simon Holmes, who for the moment largely left his breadth of dialect and prayed with so much of force and feeling, and shaped the expression of their thanks and sympathies in such stirring sentences, that they all felt as though they were kneeling at the gate of heaven.

Ned Saltmer, Simon Holmes, Alfred Atheling and Joss returned to Ned's cottage for the night. Robert Atheling's recovery was speedy, so much is the body influenced for good by a happy and contented mind: and without further delay, it was resolved that he and his new-found brother should proceed forthwith to Aspen Garth, with Joss and Simon Holmes for fellow-travellers. No words of mine can tell the joy of Widow Atheling as she welcomed her youngest born back to his place in her home and heart. Surely the beechwood logs never before flung such a glow upon the hearthstone, never before lit up the spacious ingle with such a cheerful flame.

Among the happy and grateful group that gathered there on Alfred's return was Simon Holmes, for who but he could be ill spared at a time like that? He who had wept with them that wept, must now help to make their rejoicing more.

"If there's yah thing mair then anuther te be depended

on," said Simon, "te be depended on fully an' for iver, it's this:—God's marcy is allus mair then a match for oor misery, an' prayer an' faith can set yan ageean t' other till misery mak's an end of itself an' massy gains the day. Them things 'at seeams te us te be meeast unlikely is just the sooart o' things 'at He tak's pleasure i' deeain'; just te show us 'at it pays te trust Him, nut a lahtle bit noo an' then, but oot an' oot, an' all the tahme. It's a grand thing, Mrs. Atheling, that the good Lord tohns oor varry troubles inte t' meeans o' bringin' us tiv his-self. Ah wunder hoo monny prayers hez been offered up for Mr. Alfred; an' what's prayers for *but* te be answered, ah sud like te knoa? Ah've allus said 'at as sure as Sunday morning follo's Setterday neet, them 'at sows i' tears shall reeap i' joy, an' that you wad ha' your lad, the bairn o' monny prayers, te hug te your heart ageean, because God is allus as good as His wod.

"I'll tell yo' what," continued the old carpenter, "it seeams te me 'at we niver owt te put ony limits te what God can deea for us. Why, Mr. Robert, if a lahtle ant was te cum te t' door o' your granary an' ax yo' kindly for a grain o' corn, you wad say, 'Tak' it an' welcome, ah sall loss nowt be that.' Noo, isn't it sense an' reeason that all an' everything 'at we can ask o' the Almighty is i' comparison summat less then that? I had a tree i' my garden last autumn 'at was so full o' golden apples, 'at when ah lifted me hand te pull an odd 'un, ah shak'd t' branch an' mair then a scoore on 'em fell tumm'lin' at me feet. Says ah te me-self, 'Thoo's a generous tree, an' like the God that meeade tha', thoo gi'es ma' mair then ah axed for an' mair then ah desired.'

"An' then ageean," he continued, "what a monny wunderful ways He hez o' meetin' oor wants, an' helpin' us i' oor heavy needs and foorce-puts! He's niver at a loss. If yah way weean't deea, He tries anuther. It's just

like t' fooaks 'at were on t' ship wi' Paul when it brak' its back on a rock. Some on 'em swam ashore: some on 'em wer' carried by planks, an' some on 'em floated upo' brokken pieces o' ship: some on 'em yah way, an' some on 'em anuther; but be it hoo it may, He browt 'em all seeafe ashore. *We* think 'at oor ship's the thing te bring us seeafe te land, an' all of a sudden He breks wer ship up, an' finnds us a plank 'at we nivver expected an' didn't mitch like t' looks on: but *you* can testify 'at its browt yo' te land for all that. Praise the Lord, say I."

It is no wonder that both at the Towers and the Garth, and indeed at every house in Aspendale where trouble was, the pious old carpenter was a welcome guest. There was something contagious in his firm and fervent faith; and long after the doctor had given an adverse opinion in some case of serious illness the simple villagers would ask if Simon had 'given 'em up.'

Methinks it is a pity that faith like this, power with God like this, holy influence with men like this, is so rare a thing among Christian people. Were it otherwise we might hope to see signs and wonders, wonders of healing, wonders of deliverance, wonders of reformation and conversion, wonders of rapid evangelisation which now we only dream of and so very seldom see.

CHAPTER XLI.

CLARA ATHELING UNWITTINGLY REVEALS A SECRET; AND SEÑOR BONANZA FINDS STERLING GOLD.

"So these lives that had run thus far in separate channels,
Coming in sight of each other, then swerving and bowing asunder,
Parted by barriers strong, but drawing nearer and nearer,
Rushed together at last, and one was lost in the other."

Longfellow.

FOR a while after the return of Ethel Spofforth and her brother to Aspen Towers there was a season of quiet gladness. Ethel seemed to be borne up by the pleasant experiences of home coming, and the joy of reunion was not broken in upon by any special signs of enfeebled health. With the peculiar strength of mind and the self-forgetfulness which characterised her, Ethel was resolved that, so far as she was concerned, no pains should be spared to make those long-hoped-for hours to pass without a cloud. Hence she overcame the weakness of her body by the strength of her mind and will and the peace that came to her by the firmness of her faith in God, and was so bright and cheerful and light-hearted that Clara Atheling began to think she had needlessly alarmed herself, and that after a few weeks in the fresh pure stimulating air of Aspendale, Ethel would be well and strong again.

Even Harold was lovingly deceived into a hope that his sister's sad prophecy would fail to be fulfilled, and Inez did not hesitate to express her opinion to Señor Bonanza that dear Ethel would soon be well again.

But Ethel herself was not deceived. She knew and felt the honest truth, and as usual, cheerfully coincided with it. Her days were numbered—of that she was as certain as that her life had hitherto been lengthened for a purpose. It was strongly 'borne in upon her,' as she would have put it, that she had still some work to do, and like her Lord and Master, whose example she so closely followed, she was straitened, for the sake of others, until it should be accomplished; and all the while, in perfect peace and joyous hope she said, "Father, Thy will be done!"

There was now an even closer intimacy between Aspen Garth and Aspen Towers than there had ever been before, and two things were clear to Ethel. First, that it would be a perpetual blessing, a source of moral strength for high and useful service to her brother Harold, if Clara, the staid and gentle yet merry and capable Clara, with her strong religious principles, was to become his wife. If he that findeth a wife findeth a good thing, thought she, Harold would find a remarkably 'good thing' of the kind if such an arrangement can be brought about. She felt, however, that this must not be unless there was a real affection on both sides. The idea of a 'marriage of convenience,' was not for one moment entertained by her, could not be, for anything so far removed from the regions of common sense, religion and propriety, was altogether foreign to her high-toned moral nature. She felt that nothing but mutual love could warrant such a union. So she set herself to bring the two together and to watch the progress of events. She was quite resolved that if she saw any evidence that their juvenile preference for each other existed still, she would help the union forward that she might claim Clara for a

sister, before she laid down her life charge and passed to her reward.

In the second place, Ethel did not fail to see how deeply Alfred Athelling loved the sweet maiden Inez: and as that fair damsel had not much art to disguise her affection for the youth who had been a friend to her in sore straits upon the deep, Ethel read her secret like a book. She was quite clear that if such a union could be arranged two young hearts would be made happy. She felt, too, that the remarkable literary powers which had been developed in Alfred by adversity would be greatly fostered and forwarded and biassed in the right direction by his having two such spirits as Inez and her father by his side. So Ethel Spofforth, always thinking of others and never thinking of herself, looked upon these matters as a double mission which she must accomplish before she 'fell on sleep.'

One day, when she and her brother Harold were strolling alone in the grounds around the Hall, she quietly said—

"What a sweet girl Clara is, Harold. She was always nice, but I think she is nicer now than ever. She has been a sort of second Providence to dear father, and has been as a gift of God to him in his solitude and need. I do love her, bless her, more than I ever did."

Harold, nothing loth, swallowed the bait without hesitation. He at any rate was ripe and ready for her purpose.

"Love her!" said he, "ay, and so do I. I used to think I did when we called each other sweetheart in the innocent days of long ago. I tell you what, Ethel, I wish she would be a second Providence to me, and that I might be fortunate enough to receive her as a 'gift from God.'"

Of course Ethel had no difficulty in suggesting that he might woo, as that, certainly, was the usual way to win, and that, in this case especially, he was never likely to win without.

"Would you like her for a sister?" said Harold after a pause, looking searchingly at Ethel.

"That would I with all my heart," said she, "always provided that her heart was my brother's as well as her hand."

"If I know her aright," said Harold, "those two articles will go together. Whoever has the good fortune to get one of them will get the other; and if I know myself, which in these days I think I do, I would not have the latter without the former."

On that same evening, as the two girls were seated in Ethel's bedroom, 'talking things over,' as maidens on such occasions love to do, Ethel deftly turned the current of conversation so as to carry her observations and researches a little further.

"O Clara, dear!" said she, "what a happy thing for us all it is that Alfred and Harold are with us once again. Things seem as though they must go right now, don't they? I am doubly glad for dear father's sake. He seems very anxious that Harold should settle down. Perhaps there is a lurking fear that he might be tempted to wander away again."

"That he need not fear," said Clara very positively. "Harold has fairly tried both the wrong and the right, and he will never, never take the wrong path again. You can read that in every action and almost in every word."

Whereupon Ethel drew her closely to her and kissed her, saying—

"Thank you, dear, for your hearty assurance. But what makes you feel so positive?"

"Positive?" replied Clara, "why it only needs to watch his behaviour to yourself and your father, and his general course of conduct, to see that the Harold Spofforth of to-day is another and altogether different Harold to that he was in the years that are past."

"Perhaps you view him with too partial eyes to be a safe and righteous judge, my dear," said Ethel.

She would hardly have put it in that way, however, if she had been prepared for the ingenuous blush which reddened all the features of her friend as she lifted her eyes on Ethel in mute wonder. As it was, she turned the conversation with all alacrity, quite clear now that Harold might woo and win.

When she was left alone in the silence of her chamber, Ethel smiled in quiet satisfaction, knelt by her bed to ask for Harold and for Clara that they might both be guided right, and then with a little sigh of relief she retired to rest. Her last waking thoughts had to do with Inez Bonanza. How was she to reach the maiden's father and discover how he was affected? Did he see, she wondered, or was he yet in ignorance of what was sufficiently plain to everybody else, namely, that each of these young people had the other's heart in keeping?

It was not many days after when she found the opportunity that she desired. She had been to the lower end of the village on a visit to the daughter of Peter Prout, who lay seriously indisposed. She had taken her some little dainty to tempt her appetite, and had spoken the best words by her sick bed. Señor Bonanza had been strolling round the village, conversing as his wont was with all and sundry, and winning the regard of the villagers by his kindly and courteous ways. He met Ethel on her return from the mill and turned to accompany her home.

"I am sorry, Miss Ethel, more sorry than I can tell you, that I must tear myself away from this lovely spot, and from the friends who have become very dear to me. I have received a communication from the Continent which demands my immediate presence on a matter pertaining to my estate. Believe me, I am very loth to go."

"Indeed, Señor, we shall be very sorry to part with you. My dear father seems to live again in your society. I

cannot tell you how grateful to God I am that He made it possible for you to come to us. You have cheered him and charmed him into new life—"

"Nay, nay, dear young lady," said he deprecatingly. "You forget what the return of his children has done for Sir Godwin. It is quite true that I have done my best to turn his attention as much as possible from the thought of his own ailments, and I think that I have succeeded."

"You have, indeed," said Ethel. "I trust you do not need to take Inez away. That would be a double deprivation. Next to you, with my father, comes Inez, who has crept into his heart as she does into everybody's. You will let her stay, won't you?"

"Why, to tell you the truth," said Señor Bonanza, "I have been thinking about that. I should be very glad for her to stay with you, if you think it best. I dare say I shall be absent a fortnight, or it may be a month."

Ethel suddenly became thoughtful. "If you think it best." It certainly was *not* best that Alfred Atheling and Inez should be left so near each other if the señor was opposed to any closer connection between them than that which at present existed. What should she say? Then she thought that her opportunity had come, and that it was best to be frank with him on the subject.

"I should dearly like to keep her, Señor Bonanza, for in truth she is very dear to me and of more service, too, than I can tell you. But—but——"

"Speak freely, please," he said looking down upon her with those wondrously winsome eyes, and in a tone that might well encourage her, and did. "But—what were you going to say?"

"Is it best for Inez, Señor?" said Ethel seriously. "Do you not know of any reasons that make it more advisable that she should soon leave Aspendale, for the sake of her own peace of mind?"

"Ah! you are speaking of Mr. Ravensworth—Atheling, I mean," said he. "Would you mind telling me with equal candour what you think of that young man?"

It was quite clear from this that the señor had become acquainted with the state of things as between these young people; and it was equally clear from his look and tone that he awaited with much interest Ethel's answer to his question.

"My opinion of him is this," said she, "that Alfred Atheling has in him all the makings of a man; that he has even a great future before him; and that the severe probation through which he has passed has rid him of whatever dross attached to him, and left naught behind but sterling gold. In other words, I believe him to be loyal now and hereafter to the God of his parents."

"Then why should not Inez be left to aid and comfort *you?*" said Señor Bonanza, curiously.

"Nay," said Ethel with a smile, "I did not know how you might regard the evident love he bears to Inez, nor whether you would consider him a fitting winner of so rare a prize"

"But what of Inez?" he responded. "Ought not she to have some voice in a matter in which after all she is the most interested?"

"Spoken like your noble self, dear friend," replied Ethel. "Inez loves Alfred Atheling: than that nothing can be clearer, but——"

"Yes, Inez loves Alfred Atheling; than that nothing can be clearer," said Señor Bonanza, repeating her words. "And Alfred Atheling, according to your best judgment, has lost the dross and now is sterling gold; and Paul Bonanza owes this same Alfred Atheling a heavy debt of gratitude, which he longs to repay. And withal, Paul Bonanza, in company with Miss Ethel Spofforth believes him to be sterling gold, and that he has a good and even a great future before him. Then what?"

"Then," said Ethel, perfectly content, "I suppose it will be best for Inez and for every body else that she stays with me, the darling!" and the glad smile with which this was accompanied went to 'the darling's' father's heart.

"Thanks for your hospitality, dear Miss Ethel. I will not fail to come and claim her at your hands in due time."

"If she is not spirited away in the mean time," said Ethel, with a little laugh.

"Then, where would be the 'sterling gold,' mam'selle?" was the answer. And so that matter also was in a satisfactory way of settlement, and that night Ethel the Unselfish, had another cause for grateful thanksgiving as she retired to rest.

CHAPTER XLII.

ETHEL SPOFFORTH LEAVES HER SONG UNFINISHED; AND SIR JARVIS MAINWARING AGAIN OPINES THAT IT IS "SINGULAR, VERY SINGULAR INDEED."

"Dismissed to glory with a kiss of love,
She bade the lingering moments swifter roll;
Death was to her as harmless as a dove,
While floods of glory overwhelmed her soul.
Not plucked but gathered by the hand of love,
As tender fruit or fragrant lilies are;
Transplanted to the Paradise above,
To blossom in eternal fragrance there."

Percival.

IT is not needful, neither is it within my province, to deal at length with fervent courtships and the stories of gay weddings. It must suffice, therefore, to say that when the primroses were in bloom and the scent of the violets was borne upon the spring breezes; when the song of the blackbird was heard in the dale, two weddings were celebrated. As all the parties were so intimately associated, the ceremony was performed at one and the same time. Harold Spofforth and his young wife took up their abode at Aspen Towers; and all the villagers of Thorpe Aspen engaged in the happy celebration, and all were agreed that this wedding

at anyrate, whatever may be said of some, was one of those which are 'made in heaven.'

Bold and burly Jacob Benson had sole charge of the merrymaking and feasting; but Tim Crouch was promoted to be his lieutenant; and being well restrained by the high responsibilities of that office, Tim did not overpass the line of moderation in the matter of beer. Indeed that course of conduct on the part of anybody would have been difficult, for careful precautions had been taken against any possibility of excess. Sam Vause the blacksmith managed as usual to elude all restraints. He took all that he could get of that which was supplied to the villagers in the Park and then adjourned to the Chequers. There he celebrated the home-coming of the bridal pair by getting as tipsy as his coins and his credit would permit, and then had a long snooze under the table of that not too respectable house of accommodation for travellers, with Nick Ste'enson to keep him company.

Peter Prout, who had been in great trouble about his sick daughter, now convalescent, was moved to keep his gossiping tongue with bit and bridle. He contented himself with declaring that he always thought Mr. Harold would turn out well, and as for Miss Clara, why there was not her equal in the country side. The former part of this testimony was received by the listeners with open mouths and arched eyebrows; for both Alfred Atheling and the heir of Aspen Chase had been anything but tenderly handled by the glib tongue of the miller in days gone by.

The glad welcome which the young couple had received on their return from their marriage tour was scarce over when the shadow of a great sorrow gathered and settled on Aspen Towers. Sir Godwin was suddenly prostrated by another attack of paralysis, and after lying for a few days upon the border line, passed peacefully away. He declared in simple and touching words that he had 'a good hope

through grace,' and died the while he breathed a blessing on the three dear ones who stood around his bed. As he gave Clara a farewell kiss, he said—

"Dear Clara, I cannot tell you what a joy it is to me that you and Harold are united. I know it is well for him, well for Aspen Towers, well for the villagers of Thorpe Aspen, and I believe, dear daughter, it will be well with you."

To Ethel, he simply said—

"Good-bye for a little, my loving, tender, and faithful Ethel: for a little while. I and your sainted mother will wait for you at the Gate."

To Harold he spoke long and seriously, completing what he had begun to say before the stroke came as to the management of the estates, and then said—

"Harold, my son! you will soon be master here. Tell me, what will be your governing idea when you succeed to the title and estate?"

"The motto of our house, father," said Harold with deep feeling, —"'My duty shall be my delight.' It will grow easy with Clara at my side, for we shall both ask help of God."

Then the baronet smiled, said "God bless you!" and passed away; but the smile remained and abode upon his face so long as Harold might look upon it. It was a joy, an abiding joy, to the returned and repentant son, that his father left him so. Sir Harold Spofforth and his lady lived for the good of Aspendale and the fulfilment of all the duties of their high position, and it may be truly said that their duty was their delight. On their path there was no shadow except one, and that was dark, dark indeed, the slowly but surely fading life of the gentle Ethel, who was dear to them as their own souls.

Simon Holmes was held by Sir Harold in high esteem. He made the shrewd and godly carpenter his counsellor and friend, and both he and Aspendale in general were greatly the gainers by that, for Simon's influence was such

as the Carpenter of Galilee would have exerted had He been of Aspendale instead of Nazareth.

Alfred Atheling and his young wife, Inez, removed with Señor Bonanza to a pleasant rural retreat within a short distance of London. It was a charming villa with views of the Thames and that lovely Surrey scenery which of its kind is difficult to surpass. It had been bought and furnished by Señor Bonanza, and from hence Alfred could readily reach his publishers in the city, who soon discovered that he was a 'coming man;' and that his literary success would bring large profits both for him and them. They would fain have had Captain Lanyon to say good-bye to a mariner's life and reside with them; but the Captain declared that he could not leave the sea. He would make "Ravensworth," as the villa was called, his home when on shore, but his 'home was on the deep,' and so he took command of the *Ruth Hartgold*, and Will Trounce and Joe Hewitt sailed with their old skipper, and soon became as fervent as Captain Crumpit in sounding the praises of the Quaker merchant who had the 'heart of gold.'

When the autumn sun had fully ripened the corn and the broad wheatfields of Aspen Garth were bright with waving gold, Robert Atheling brought home his bride, and never Boaz in this world was prouder of his Ruth than Robert was when 'he and she together rubbed the ears of ripened grain.' Widow Atheling, happy woman, took the sweet maiden to her heart as she laughed and cried by turns. His brother Edgar was located at Aspen Grange, and found a worthy mate in the daughter of his predecessor on that fertile farm.

Of course there was another feast at Aspen Garth to celebrate the home-coming of Robert Atheling and Ruth, and the villagers again made holiday. Simon Holmes was master of the ceremonies now, and the old carpenter seemed to forget that he was not quite so young as he was when

Robert's father and mother were yoked in marriage bonds in the little church at Thorpe Aspen, and when he had joined to ring out their marriage bells. Nothing would do for him but he must, on this happy occasion, mount the belfry stairs and pull the bell ropes once again.

At Simon Holmes' suggestion, and seeing that he felt himself to be getting past active work and had competent means to retire upon, Ned Saltmer became the village carpenter, and he and Madge were happy to be located in bonny Yorkshire once again. This arrangement was highly satisfactory to Joss, who could still divide his attentions between Robert and Ned, and hold undisturbed possession of the hearthstone in the carpenter's cottage or in the ingle of Aspen Garth.

For some months there was peace, real peace and happiness, in quiet Aspendale, and Ethel was permitted to drink to the full of the sweet enjoyment which she had been so largely instrumental in making possible. She was utterly happy and content. Then, alas, the cloud which had been slowly but surely gathering all the while, hung dark and heavy over Aspendale and especially over Aspen Towers. But there was a silver lining to it, for though Ethel Spofforth, Ethel the Unselfish, was 'called hence,' it was not so much a death as a translation. She had finished the work that was given her to do, the work for which she was raised awhile from the bed of death; and now again the Master called, called her kindly and tenderly, and she gladly obeyed the call.

Harold and Clara sent to London for Sir Jarvis Mainwaring, who responded with unusual speed and readiness to such a call; for he had never forgotten the song which this imprisoned bird had sung in his ears through the bars of her cage. But with all his skill and zeal on her behalf, or rather on behalf of those who would have kept her here, he was unable to clip her wings or chain her

spirit any longer to this bare earth. As he stood by her bed and listened to her testimony concerning her Saviour and His love, the great physician stood amazed and softened. She held such evident communion with heaven that it seemed to him as though her death chamber was peopled by angelic spirits who in some subtle way made their presence known to him. He could simply stand and look, or appear to look. for sooth to say his eyes were dim with unaccustomed tears.

When the time drew near for her departure, not only Harold and Clara, but Robert and Ruth Atheling, Alfred and Inez, Señor Bonanza and Simon Holmes, were gathered round her bed. To all of them she spoke some loving and tender word, and all she said was redolent of peace and hope and of a higher joy than can come to those who are less near heaven than she was. Then she turned to the old carpenter, who had been a daily visitor, and whose mellow counsels, inspiring prayers and welcome words, that seemed to make her faith more strong, had been very precious all the time. He too had been summoned to see her 'preen her wings for flight.'

"Farewell for a little while, dear friend, faithful adviser and comforter in trouble. It is but for a little. You and I will resume our best-loved theme by-and-by."

"Ay, ay, mah bairn!" said the old man, speaking in a voice broken with sobs, "you can leeave t' door upo' t' latch, an' tell t' shinin' ones 'at ah sall expect 'em efter a bit."

Ethel smiled sweetly at the thought, and nodded her head as though she had got the message clearly and meant to carry it.

Then as she looked with loving gaze on first one and then another of those who, standing round, were sad and tearful and loth to let her go, she said—

"Dear, dear friends! Why do you weep? I wish you wouldn't. I never felt less like shedding tears. I wish

you would sing. I should like to float to heaven on a song. Sing! sing—

'Rock of Ages, cleft for me.'"

But there was no voice, neither any that answered, only sobs that came unbidden and refused to be hushed to silence.

"Inez, dear," said she, with a smile that rested through long years on her memory, "you can sing. Do you remember the evening hymn you sang when you were tossing in that frail boat out at sea? Sing to me

'Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes.'

Oh do, dear Inez, do!"

The request was uttered with such eagerness that sweet Inez seemed to feel it as a command, a sacred request that must be obeyed. So she set herself to the task, resolved to control herself until it was done. Bravely she began it, bravely and firmly she forced her sweet voice through the first and second lines. No sooner did she reach, "Heaven's morning breaks," than Ethel's eyes were lifted toward a light they could not see, and her hands were raised as if in expectation. I think, had Inez continued, the saintly maiden would have soared before the song had ended. But it was not to be, could not be, for Inez failed to utter one word more, but knelt by the bed and sought to hush the sobs that would break from her by burying her face in the coverlet. This recalled Ethel, who had already poised her wings. She looked at Inez with tender pity, and moved her hand so as to touch the young wife's raven locks, and said—

"Nay, dear Inez, never mind! Thank you, I thought I was going to the music of that sweet psalm. All is well, dear ones. Hush! I'll sing!"

She raised her hand, transparent as an angel's; an un-

kindled light sat upon her face, a light that deepened and brightened as she sang in a soft sweet voice, weak, but strangely clear—

'He by Himself hath sworn,
I on His oath depend,
I shall on angel wings upborne
To heaven ascend.
I shall behold His face,
I shall His power adore,
And sing the wonders of His grace
For evermore!"

The last syllable had not fully left her lips when her voice ceased, her hand fell, and the light upon her features flitted somewhat, leaving still a token on the face that it had been there. Once more the Master took her by the hand. Once more she heard the Wonder-worker's voice, "Talitha cumi!" Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise! So Ethel Spofforth went up, went home; ascending with a song upon her lips and the light of "Heaven's morning" on her face!

As Sir Jasper Mainwaring and Simon Holmes descended the stairs in company, the physician was very silent, but as they reached the lower floor he said, as if speaking to himself, just what he had said before when the now translated maiden was brought back to life by means of his own strange dream—

"It's very singular,—very singular indeed!"

"O Sir Jarvis!" said Simon Holmes, as well as he could for the deep feeling which had broken up the fountains of his heart, "there's nowt sing'lar aboot it. Its all ov a piece. He's just finished His wark as He began it. Ah've knoan her iver since she was that high," he continued, holding his hand up a short distance from the ground; "an' she's been yan o' the Lord's darlin's all t' tahme. When she fun' peeace an' joy throo beleeavin', she just gat t' print o' heaven on her, an' it's been growin' clearer an' prattier

iver since. When yo' com' te see her afoore, she was as mitch of a angel as it's gi'en te mottals to be on this side o' Jordan. The Lord sent fo' yo' te fetch her back just as she was crossin', 'at she might seeave her bruther. All t' tahme she was at it, she was gettin' riper an' sweeter: an' noo 'at it's deean, she's gotten her reward. Oh but it's grand! it's grand! Ah've seen a dew-drop shinin' like a jewel i' t' heart of a rose: an' while ah've watched it, t' sun's cum', an' just kissed it off an' ta'en it oot o' seet. That's Miss Ethel tiv a T. God bless her! She was just a pure an' lovely dewdrop shinin' upo' t' heart of her Saviour doon here. Noo, t' glory leet's shon' doon on her an' her sweet soul's kissed up te heaven! It's my opinion," said the old carpenter emphatically, "that the Lord's just gone, an' deean the meeast nat'ral thing i' t' wo'ld. Sweets te the sweet, ye' knoa, Sir Jasper, an' she's wheear she owt te be—

'Lap't i' sweet repose
On her sweet Saviour's breast.'

Excuse me, Sir Jarvis, but you an' me can't deea better then cling close te t' Saviour o' men when He puts such a finish to this mortal life as that we've just seen."

Said Sir Jarvis Mainwaring—

"Simon Holmes. From my soul I think you're right."

"Praise the Lord!" said Simon. "But you may knoa it, Sir Jarvis. You may knoa it!"

Reader! So may you and I!

THE END.

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